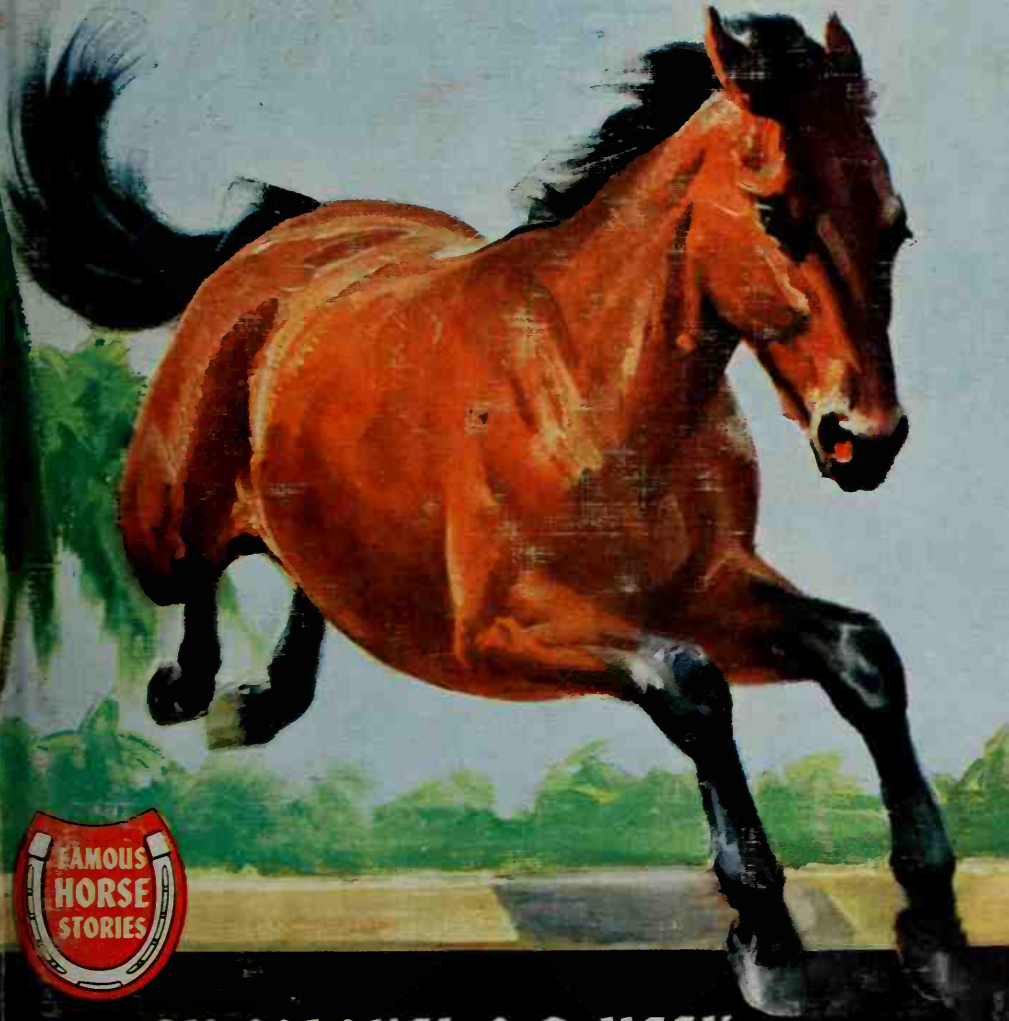
FROG

THE HORSE THAT KNEW NO MASTER


FAMOUS HORSE STORIES

BY COLONEL S. P. MEEK

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COLONEL S. P. MEEK

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ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES HARGENS

FAMOUS
HORSE
STORIES

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers, New York

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To my wife
EDNA NOBLE MEEK

Acknowledgment is made of the courtesy of Saint Nicholas, for permission to republish the following stories which first appeared in that magazine: *Scott Makes Good, Two Little Cats.*

PREFACE

It takes a great deal of courage to launch a new book into the world in these difficult times, but, emboldened by the very kind reception given by the reading public to my former effort, "Jerry, the Adventures of an Army Dog," I have managed to muster up the required amount. Now that I have written "Frog," I find that I must answer two questions: Why did I write it; and what was my object in writing it? Not to mention a third query: Why should it be presented to the reading public?

The first question is easily answered. I wrote it because I wanted to, because I enjoyed putting down on paper some remembrances of those old days in Empire when horses filled a large part of my daily existence, and the winning—or losing—of a polo game or a gymkhana was a thing of vital importance. Needless to say, I was younger then, by a good many years, than I am now.

The second question is a more difficult one. Someone, wiser than I am, has said that every book is written with one of three objects in the author's mind, either to influence, to instruct, or to entertain his audience. I most certainly am not aiming to influence, I am not conscious of any desire to instruct, so my object, by a process of elimination, must have been to entertain. If I succeed in that, I will be satisfied.

There is only one excuse that I can see for its publication. There is a sad dearth of stories dealing with peace-time army life. It was to try to fill this gap that I started writing. In my books, I hope to give my readers some idea of how the United States Army lives. Not the patriotic, war-time army, fired by patriotism to enlist, and expecting to meet an enemy in armed conflict, but the peace-time army. That little group of men, less than 125,000 in all, who have seriously devoted their lives to the military profession. Who are not fired by patriotic motives especially, but who like the military service. Who are making of themselves a living laboratory for the testing of new devices in warfare and new developments in tactics, and a repository for keeping alive the art of defense, and the lessons, learned in blood, of previous conflicts. They live, they carry on, they die; unheralded and unsung; satisfied with a day's work well done; and their mode of life is an interesting one—to me, at least. There, I have let the cat out of the bag. Perhaps I did mean to instruct a little, after all.

In writing "Frog," I have again, as I did in

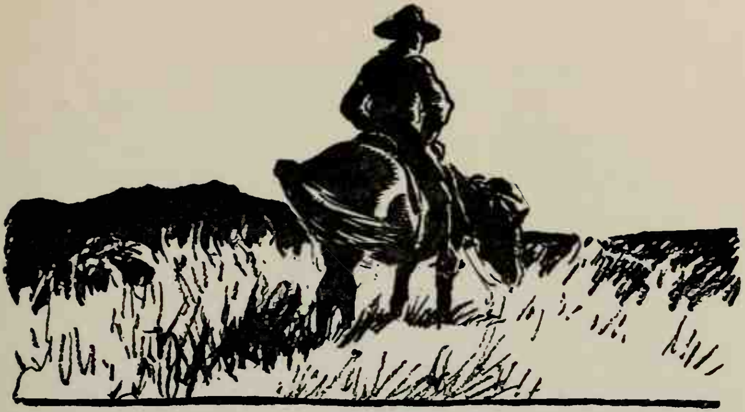
" Jerry," drawn on my fifteen years in the military service for both backgrounds and materials. Even as Jerry was a real dog who wandered onto the post at Benicia Arsenal one day and won his right to remain there, Frog was a real horse. He was my first mount during those days in 1919 and 1920 when I commanded the sub-post of Empire. I think I have painted his portrait truthfully, although the haze of years may have made the picture more rosy than it really was. At any rate, he had the trick described, of jumping straight forward without any visible preparation, and from this he got his name. It was a very disconcerting trick, and I must admit that he policed me more than once before I learned it, and how to guard against it.

I do not pretend that " Frog " is, in any sense, history. It is merely a story, told to entertain, and possibly, to instruct—a very little. However, some of the incidents described, notably certain of those in Chapters II, III, IV, V, and VIII, are based on actions of Frog during the time I rode him. I have had to take severe liberties with facts, at times, to fit these incidents into readable stories, but I am sure that Frog will forgive me, and I hope my readers will. Frog was a good horse, and it was with sincere regret that I turned him over to another officer when I left the Canal Zone in December of 1920.

Preface

Those who have read my previous book will find that there is a very marked difference between " Jerry " and " Frog." In " Jerry," I told my story and described army life from the viewpoint of enlisted men. The officers were rather shadowy creatures, who came on the stage, said their little speech, and departed. In " Frog," the reverse is the case. The story is told from the point of view of the commissioned officer, and the enlisted men are relatively less important. In a future book, I hope to be able to combine the two sides of army life, and tell the story of a young man who enlists, and who, instead of becoming one of those old non-commissioned officers who are aptly described as " the back-bone of the army," succeeds in winning his way into the United States Military Academy at West Point, and emerges an officer. With this third book, the trilogy will be complete.

S. P. Meek,
Colonel, U. S. Army, Retired.



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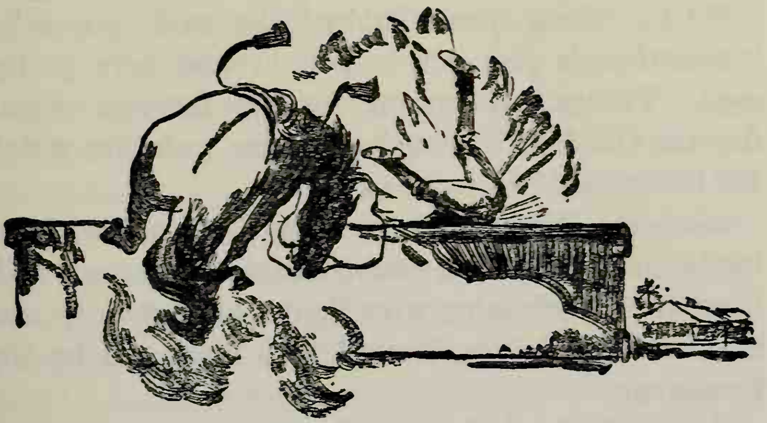


I

THE HORSE THAT KNEW NO MASTER

The headquarters corral of the Nineteenth United States Cavalry at Empire lay somnolent in the mid-afternoon heat of the Canal Zone. At the roofed picket line a horse occasionally stirred himself enough to stamp an indolent hoof or to switch his tail at a buzzing fly. Only two human figures were in sight. In the shade of the corral office, Stable Sergeant Baker poured his troubles into the sympathetic ear of his friend and ally, the chief cargador of the Fifty-Third Pack Train.

" I'm telling you, Tubby," he said earnestly, " something's just got to pop around here pretty soon. Things can't go on this way forever. Some day the Old Man's going to get wise, and then watch the fireworks."

Sergeant Winsoton wiped the perspiration from his beaming full-moon countenance and glanced with envy at Baker's trim, wiry figure, his dry brow and his firm-lipped face, burned to a brick red by the tropic sun.

" Old Snake-foot been bearing down on you, boy? " he asked sympathetically.

" Not on me, Tubby, but on the ponies. Ever since Captain Wells went back to the States and Glover was assigned as corral officer, he's been playing hob with our best mounts. He understands about as much about horses as you do about dieting."

" And that's next to nothing," admitted Winsoton with a sigh as he looked down at his corpulent figure which bulged his olive-drab shirt almost to the bursting point. " But give the devil his due, Pete. I don't like Snake-foot any more than you do. The darned prune jumped me yesterday and told me to take more exercise or he'd bust me back to private. Exercise in this heat! " Winsoton's plump face registered profound disgust. " He's full of canal milk, if you ask me. All the same, you've got to admit that he is a good horseman . . . er, that is, a good rider."

Sergeant Baker gave vent to a snort.

" Good rider, yes," he said. " That is, he can keep his seat on anything that has four legs and a tail, but that doesn't make him a good horseman. He's been up on a dozen mounts in the last three months and he's got every one of them so nervous that they'll jump half out of their hides if you touch them suddenly. Look at Pedro, just for one. He's just as nervous today as he used to be before Captain Kildare straightened him out."

" Why don't you do something about it, boy? "

" What can I do? Nothing but salute and say ' Yes, sir.' I did get him to ride Frog, hoping that he'd be killed, but you're right. He can ride. He's had Frog out every day for two weeks and hasn't been policed once. That's more than any other officer on the post can say. He's out on him now, rode to Paja this morning."

" If he can keep a seat on that crazy fool, Frog, he can ride anything in the world, Pete. Has Frog tried to police him? "

" A dozen times, but he hasn't had any luck, hang it. Snake-foot is too clever for even Frog to throw."

" You ought to get rid of that horse, Pete. He's no earthly good to anyone and some day he's going to kill a man. I've seen him go after a stable police with his front feet pounding and his teeth bared. When a horse does that, he's a killer."

" I know it, and yet, I think Frog has something in him. He's the fastest thing on the post, you can't tire him out, and he can jump like a buck rabbit. I've been watching him for a couple of years, seen him police a dozen officers and send three men to the hospital, yet I still believe in him. If the right man ever got hold of Frog, he'd make a real horse out of him."

" Why don't you try it? "

Sergeant Baker made a swift movement of his hand suggestive of decapitation and lugubriously hummed a few bars of the funeral march.

" Catch me fooling with an officer's mount," he laughed derisively. " I'm not anxious to go back on stable police as a buck private. No, it's got to be an officer and there isn't one on the post who can do it."

" I know an officer who could," Winsoton said. " If Lieutenant Scott ever got hold of him, he'd have him eating out of his hand in jig time."

" Scott? You mean the Scott who played Number Two on the Third Cavalry polo team last year? "

" That's the man. I soldiered in his troop when he was a shavetail at Fort Riley. He can do anything with a horse except make him talk . . . I don't think he's tried that yet. He used to take the toughest old cayuses fresh off the Texas ranges and make well-mannered chargers out of them in six months, just for amusement."

"No chance of his coming down here, is there?"

"You never can tell, he ought to be due for foreign service pretty soon. Gosh, I wish he'd come here. You'd see a big change in this corral in short order."

"How would he and Snake-foot get along?"

"Oh, all right, I guess. Scott can get along with anyone. Men like him just as well as horses do, and in two hours every kid on the post would be following him around, trying to walk like he does."

"I wish we could swap Snake-foot for him. He plays a good game of polo too, doesn't he?"

"Polo? Boy, you ain't seen nothing until you've seen him swing a mallet. The artillery wouldn't have a chance this year if we had him on the team as Number Two instead of Lieutenant Bowen."

The clatter of hoofs sounded on the quiet air. Both men looked up quickly. Sergeant Winsoton scrambled to his feet with an agility that was surprising in one of his bulk.

"Here comes Snake-foot now," he said. "I'm going to duck before he springs that exercise stuff on me again. Better look busy, Pete."

He disappeared rapidly around the corner of the building. Sergeant Baker rose slowly to his feet and faced the corral entrance. Coming down the road at a brisk trot was a dark bay gelding with black points. His long tail and mane rippled in the breeze made by his movement, casting off a glint as though they had been made of spun glass. His even gait and the rhythmic flow of his tireless muscles made him a picture to delight the heart of a horse lover. Despite the fact that he was just finishing a twenty-mile trip through the tropic heat, he held his head high and stepped along proudly, as though spurning the commonplace earth beneath his dainty hoofs. Although only two inches over fourteen hands high, Frog could stand without distress a trip that would completely wear out a larger, stronger horse not so well adapted to the tropics. Tough as he was, however, this trip had told on him, as was evidenced by the fact that his flanks were white with lather and by the flecks of foam that dropped from the corners of his mouth.

From the horse Baker shifted his gaze to the rider. As he did so the expression of admiration which had come into his face as he watched Frog's smooth, fast trot faded and a grim, set look took its place.

Lieutenant Glover stood an inch over six feet in his stockings, but he was abnormally thin. His long legs seemed to be literally wrapped around his mount. It was evident, even to a tyro at riding, that the horse would have little chance of unseating him. A jutting jaw gave an impression of firmness to his face, but his too close set eyes and the extreme thinness of his face combined with the heavy wrinkles between his eyes to give him an unpleasant expression, the expression of a man liable to violent outbursts of uncontrollable temper. It was not alone for his long thin feet that Glover was named "Snake-foot" by the men serving under him.

As he entered the corral Glover wrenched savagely at his mount's head, brought him up standing. He cast a swift glance around, then jammed his spurs viciously into Frog's side, turning his head toward the big circular watering trough in the center of the corral. The grimness in Sergeant Baker's face gave way to astonishment, then to something akin to dismay.

" He's not going to water Frog while he's heated that way? " he gasped to himself. " Why, it's sheer murder."

Glover rode Frog to the trough, slackened the reins to allow the horse to reach the water. Sergeant Baker hurried forward anxiously. Glover looked up with a frown as his subordinate approached.

" You're not going to water him while he's hot, sir? " protested the sergeant.

" He's not hot, or if he is, it's his own fault. He's been fighting me like a demon all day. I had to show him who was boss half a dozen times. My arm is worn out from swinging a quirt."

Baker glanced at Frog's flanks. A dozen welts standing out on the satiny smoothness of his skin showed that Glover spoke the truth. The grim look came back into the sergeant's face and he ground his teeth, but he dared protest no further. He moved to Frog's head, reached for his bridle.

" What are you doing? " asked Glover sharply.

" Just taking out his bit, sir, so he can drink more comfortably."

" Let the crazy fool drink with it in. It won't hurt him."

" Very well, sir."

Sergeant Baker stepped back. Glover slipped his long snake-like feet from the stirrups and wiggled them to relax his ankles.

" I'm tired out," he said. " This fool gave me a tough fight all the way to Paja and half-way back. It seems impossible to tire him out or to beat any sense into his head."

Baker made no reply. His attention was fixed on the horse. Frog had dipped his nose into the trough but he was not gulping down the water as Baker had expected he would. Instead he seemed to be waiting. As Baker watched the horse began to crouch slightly. His eyes rolled back, showing the whites, while his teeth under the water were bared viciously.

" Look out, sir! " Baker cried suddenly.

His warning came too late. Glover snatched at the loosened reins while his feet sought the stirrups, but they were no longer where he could reach them. Frog had suddenly bucked and made a half turn at the same time. Glover ingloriously pulled leather but too late to save himself. He rose in an arc and landed in the watering trough with a resounding splash.

Baker, his sides heaving with suppressed mirth, jumped to help the officer but he was tossed aside like a straw. Frog had reared and was driving at the prostrate Glover with vicious hoofs, his teeth bared and squeals of rage coming from his throat. One lashing hoof caught Glover on the head, half stunning him. The officer floundered in the water, tried to shield his head and face from the menace of those flashing steel-shod hoofs.

He rolled momentarily out of the horse's reach, but Frog was not to be denied. His forefeet came up together and landed in the trough. In another instant he was climbing in, intent on settling his score with his quondam rider.

Glover gained his feet and staggered to the opposite side of the big trough, Frog plunging after him. The horse reached for him with bared teeth in the intervals of striking with deadly intent. Glover tumbled out of the trough and took to his heels.

Sergeant Baker grabbed a pitchfork and followed the raging horse. If he got Glover down, Baker meant to drive the fork into his haunch in the hope that he would draw the attack and give the officer a chance to escape. Knowing Frog, he had little hope that anything short of a fatal wound would make him stop an attack once fairly launched.

Before the fleeing Glover opened an empty box stall. He dashed into it, Frog at his heels. The manger was a high one, but the lieutenant scrambled over it just in time to escape his pursuer's teeth. Sergeant Baker came up at a run and slammed down the bar of the stall, imprisoning the angry horse.

" Are you hurt, sir? " he cried anxiously.

Glover vaulted over the manger of the next stall, his face livid with rage. He saw the sergeant, wrenched the fork from his hand and dashed at the box stall holding Frog. Baker was galvanized into action.

" Wait a minute, sir! " he cried, a detaining hand on the officer's shoulder. Glover whirled about angrily.

"Keep your dirty paws off me!" he stormed. "I'm going to kill that incarnate devil!"

He lunged at Frog with the fork but Baker caught his arm and deflected the blow. Glover whirled on him, the fork handle raised like a club, but the blow did not fall. There was something in Baker's cold grey eyes and the set of his firm, tight lips that made the officer pause.

"No, sir," the sergeant said quietly. "I'm responsible for that horse and he won't be killed except on the colonel's orders. I'm sorry, sir, but I can't let you stick him."

"You're under arrest!" said Glover, his voice dripping deadly rage.

"Very well, sir," Baker said as he straightened to attention and rendered a military salute with the utmost precision. "The lieutenant can prefer charges against me as soon as he wishes, but meanwhile he isn't going to stick a fork into that horse."

The two men stared at one another eye to eye, but it was the officer's gaze which fell first. Glover turned and hurling the pitchfork from him with an oath, stalked violently out of the corral. Sergeant Baker stared after the retreating figure, disgust written large on his face. He quietly picked up the fork and restored it to its place. He turned at the sound of footsteps to see Sergeant Winsoton approaching, his plump face wrinkled with consternation.

" Boy, you're sure in for it now," was the chief cargador's greeting. " Snake-foot will have the sergeant of the guard down after you in ten minutes to haul you off to clink."

" Let him! " snapped Baker. " I've kept my mouth shut long enough about things down here. I'd give a month's pay to have him try to prefer charges against me. But he won't," he went on, an expression of disappointment in his voice. " He was in the wrong and he knows it. He'll cool down and be afraid to do anything. What he'll do is to take it out on the poor ponies for the next week. That's the kind of a bird he is."

" It's too bad he didn't stick Frog with that fork or else poke you one," said Winsoton reflectively. " Then you'd have him dead to rights."

" I wouldn't have minded him poking me," replied Baker, " but I'm glad he didn't get that fork into Frog. If he had, I'd have jumped on him and finished the policing Frog started. Then I'd have been tried instead of him. Oh, well, it's all in a hitch. He'll go back to the States in another year and then maybe we'll get a white man here." He turned to Frog and spoke soothingly. " Calm down, pony," he said. " As soon as you're quiet enough that I can come in without being killed, I'll take that saddle and curb bit off you. A little later you can have some water."

Glover stalked out of the corral at a white heat. His first thought was to go to post headquarters and demand that Sergeant Baker be thrown into the guard house, but the thought of his torn and dripping uniform made him pause. It would not do to go to headquarters looking like that. He turned into the bachelor quarters to wash the grime from his face and hands and to don a fresh uniform.

By the time he had made himself presentable his first heat of unreasoning anger had passed and a certain uneasiness had taken its place. His mind ran along the precise lines which Sergeant Baker had prophesied. He knew very well that he had no business to attack a horse with a fork, except to save life, and the sergeant had been right in withstanding him. His anger rose again as he thought of the physical resistance which Baker had opposed to him, but the uneasiness in his mind was growing rapidly.

"I'll get even with him for that if it's the last thing I do," he muttered as he hooked his blouse, "but I'll have to wait and let this blow over first. I hope Baker has sense enough to keep his mouth shut. If he goes blabbing to Colonel Bennitt, my name's likely to be Dennis. The Old Man's been pretty sore at me ever since that sneak, Kildare, reported that some of his darned polo ponies were nervous. I guess I'd better drill on up to headquarters and be on hand if Baker comes up and tries to squeal."

He walked slowly toward headquarters, revolving the matter in his mind. After all, it was not hopeless. If Baker had already made a report, he could admit his rage and claim that it was the result of a prolonged fight with the horse. He could minimize his actions and probably wriggle out of it. On the other hand, if Baker had not yet reported it, he would not mention the matter, but would hunt the sergeant up and smooth the matter over. Ten dollars and an apology, he thought, would insure Baker's silence.

" And I'll sure make him sweat for that ten bucks before I'm through with him," he promised himself grimly. In a more cheerful frame of mind he entered the adjutant's office.

" Hello, Glover," said the adjutant as he entered. " Did you find Manuel all right? "

" Yes, I found him, Lacey, and made all the arrangements. He'll be in with six men tomorrow."

" Fine, I'll tell the colonel. Anything else? "

" Not that I can think of."

" All right. Say, before I forget it, we got a cable today telling us who Bowen's replacement will be. It's Scott."

"Not Roy Scott of the Third?"

"That's the man. A first-class officer and a wonderful polo player."

"Why, he ——" Glover's face darkened. The arrival of Scott would effectually end his hopes of taking the place which Bowen would leave vacant on the Nineteenth's polo team. Lieutenant Lacey looked at him keenly.

"What's the matter, Glover, don't you like him? He's a fine file from all I hear. Both Colonel Bennitt and Major Caldwell know him and they say he's top-hole. And think what it will mean to the polo team. He carries a four-goal handicap."

"Yes, I see." A sudden gleam of malice swept over Glover's saturnine face. "He's supposed to be a good horseman, isn't he?"

"A wonder, Colonel Bennitt says."

"In that case, if he's as good as he thinks he is, he'll be a good man to try to break Frog," Glover suggested darkly.

"He might be, at that. Why? Have you had trouble with Frog again?"

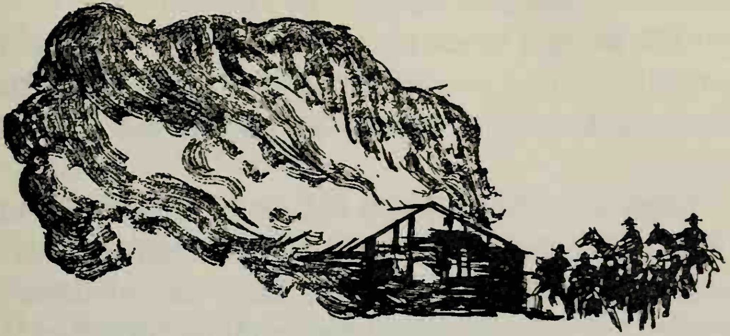
"Yet," snapped Glover. "I've ridden him by sheer strength, but I haven't made any headway at breaking him. I've had trouble enough with that horse. I'm through riding him. He ought to be shot. He's a man-killer if I ever saw one."

"Yes, I guess he is. If you can't handle him, I'll speak to the colonel about putting him up before the inspector on his next visit. Would you like to talk to him about it yourself?"

"I haven't time now. I've got to go down to the corral and see Baker about a little matter. Anyway, I'd hate to deprive your paragon, Scott, of the opportunity of showing what he can do with a really vicious horse."

With a twisted smile on his face Glover turned and walked out of the office. Lacey stared after him reflectively for a few moments.

"I wonder what Glover has against Scott?" he said to himself. "Well, it doesn't matter much because Glover is due for a transfer to Corozal as soon as Scott gets here. The colonel thinks he'll be better on a staff job than with a regiment. I agree with him, at that. Glover can't handle a troop and I haven't liked the way the polo string has been acting since he has been in charge of the corral. Neither the men nor the horses seem to care much for Glover, for all he's a top-hole rider."



II

SCOTT MAKES GOOD

"Boy, you sure got a break this time," chuckled Sergeant Winsoton as he entered the headquarters corral.

Sergeant Baker looked up, his tight lips parted in a smile.

"You mean about Snake-foot getting shanghaied to Corozal?" he asked.

"That and Scott coming down here. Think of it, Pete, a real he-man instead of that gentleman by act of Congress, a four-goal handicap Number Two and the best horseman in this man's army. Hi-lee, hi-lo," Winsoton chortled in glee and executed a few clumsy dance steps. "And he won't tell me to take any exercise in this heat either," he exulted.

"I'll be glad to see him," replied Baker non-committally. "Just now the thing that tickles me is that Glover's leaving. That's a real break for the ponies."

"And for you too, you old owl," said Winsoton. "He'd have had you busted and on stable police in another three months if he'd have stayed here. I expected to see him throw you in clink yesterday."

"Oh, that!" Baker snorted in disgust. "I told you he wouldn't dare try that. He came down here an hour after Frog threw him to see me about it. He said he was sorry he lost his temper and thanked me for holding him back. Then he offered me ten dollars to keep my mouth shut."

"What did you do?"

"I said, 'Don't worry, Lieutenant, I won't admit that any officer of the Nineteenth tried to pull off a stunt like that. As for the money, I think you'd better use it to buy liniment for some of the horses you've beaten up.'"

Winsoton whistled.

"Boy, you've got nerve, plenty of it. What did Snake-foot do?"

" I thought for a minute he was going to take a poke at me, but he didn't. He stuffed the money back in his pocket and walked away without a word."

" He'd have got even though, if he'd have stayed," said Winsoton. " Still, no need to worry now. Scott will change all that."

" Do you still think he can ride Frog and get away with it? " asked Baker.

" Think so? Boy, I'll bet a month's pay against a Panamanian dime that he'll have Frog eating out of his hand in a month."

" I hope so," said Baker reflectively. " It's Frog's last chance. No one here can handle him and the Old Man says he'll have him condemned and shot as an outlaw if he cripples another man. When does Scott get here? "

" On the *St. Mihiel* next Friday."

" Well, I'll send Frog up to his quarters as soon as he gets here and see what he can do with him. I still think that horse has the makings of a fine charger if the right man gets hold of him."

" The right man will get him when Scott takes him in charge," said Winsoton confidently. " Now I've got to go over and start my gang of loafers polishing up the gee-gee's hoofs. Snake-foot would never notice a thing like that, but Scott sees everything about a horse or a mule at one glance. You send Frog up to him and watch the way he does things to him."

"All right, Tubby, I'll do it. I sure hope he can handle him."

Lieutenant Scott looked up from his unpacking as he heard the sound of hoofs approaching his quarters. Two horses stopped before the hitching-rack and he went to the door in time to see a stable orderly tie to the rack a beautiful dark bay gelding with black points.

"Whose horse is that?" he called as he admired the clean lines and intelligent head of the animal.

"The stable sergeant sent him up for the lieutenant," answered the orderly with a salute. "He's the fastest horse we have, but he's a little mean."

"Tell the sergeant that I'm much obliged. I'll be down to see him soon."

"Yes, sir," replied the orderly as he mounted and trotted off toward the corral.

Scott forgot his unpacking in the face of a newly acquired mount. He hastily buckled on a pair of spurs and went out to inspect it. As he crossed the road with the peculiar swinging stride which is both the distinguishing mark and the proud acquisition of the cavalryman, he looked every inch a horseman. His compact, closely-knit figure was only of middle height, but there was not an ounce of surplus flesh on him. Thin drawn and fine cut, he looked as though he could bear the brunt of work that would wear most men out and come up smiling for more. He removed his campaign hat and passed a thin, sinewy hand over his close-cropped blond curls as he approached the horse.

" Good boy," he said as he rubbed Frog's nose, his keen blue eyes glittering as they took in the satiny coat and the dainty hoofs of his new mount. " You look as if you had real speed. I think we'll get along together fine."

He stepped to the horse's side to adjust the saddle. Frog made a lightning-like grab and the lieutenant leaped back out of danger with the left sleeve of his shirt torn off. Frog's heels lashed out viciously, but Scott stepped back out of kicking range and looked at him with admiration.

" Plenty of pep, haven't you, pony? " he said lightly. " I guess we'll have to watch you rather closely for a while."

He shortened the halter-shank, adjusted the saddle to his liking, mounted, and rode to the corral.

" I'm Lieutenant Scott," he said to Sergeant Baker as he dismounted. " Thanks for sending me up this horse. He seems to be a little skittish."

" Well, sir," said Baker cautiously, " he hasn't been handled just right recently, but I think he's a good horse."

"No doubt about that," agreed Scott. "Let me see his descriptive card, will you?"

Sergeant Baker turned into the corral office and Scott's attention was drawn by two hundred and forty pounds of soldier standing at rigid attention, a wide smile on his broad face. Scott gazed at him for a moment in doubt and then recognition came.

"Why, Winsoton!" he exclaimed as he extended his hand. "I'm glad to see you. What are you doing here?"

"I'm chief cargador of the Fifty-Third Pack Train, sir," said Winsoton as he gripped the lieutenant's hand. "I'm sure glad to see the lieutenant again, sir."

"The Fifty-Third, eh?" said Scott. "I'll come down tomorrow and look your outfit over. Got your mules all shined up?"

"Yes, sir; every gee-gee's hoofs are polished. We'll be ready for the lieutenant any time."

"That's good, but what's happened to you? You've put on a good deal of weight since I saw you last."

Winsoton's face crimsoned.

"Well, sir, you see," he stammered, "we have a pretty good mess sergeant. . . ."

" I knew that without your telling me," laughed Scott. " I think about the first thing I'll do here is to start you on a course of exercises to reduce your weight. . . ."

There was a strangled laugh from Baker as Winsoton's jaw fell. Scott joined merrily in the laughter, then turned to take the descriptive card which Baker extended to him. He studied it carefully.

The official name of the horse was *Godofredo,* which was probably accounted for by the fact that he had been foaled in Costa Rica nine years earlier. He had been purchased by the army and shipped to the Canal Zone six years before, and the characters given him by the several officers who had essayed to ride him bore mute witness to the stormy life he had led. " Outlaw," " vicious," " unmanageable," were only a few of them, but Scott passed lightly over these and centered his attention on one entry. One officer had given Frog a character of " excellent."

" Someone knew how to handle him and that proves he can be handled," he mused. " He has good gaits and is apparently sound. I'll make a good horse out of him yet."

" Why do you call him Frog? " he asked the stable sergeant.

" Well, sir, it's this way. Godofredo is too long for every-day use, so we gave him a nickname. We called him Frog because he has a habit of squatting down on his haunches and jumping just like a frog."

"Is he really vicious?"

"Yes, sir. Grooming him is a punishment detail. No one goes around his stall without carrying a pitchfork."

"No wonder the poor brute is vicious. That's no way to handle a horse. Have you an empty box stall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take his harness off and turn him loose in it. Give orders that no one is to feed, water, or groom him, except myself."

Frog enjoyed the freedom of a box stall, but he had a reputation for viciousness to maintain and it took three dry days in the sultry heat of Panama to make him sufficiently thirsty to allow Scott to pick up and examine his hoofs without protest. It was another week before he would allow himself to be groomed without being tied, but Scott was blessed with the patience of Job and a deep and sympathetic understanding of horse nature, and he did not try to rush matters. Frog gradually learned that the lieutenant was not intentionally hurting him, and finally tolerated him in his stall without protest. Scott made progress gradually, and in three weeks he was able to saddle and bridle Frog without first hitching him. At this point he determined to try him on the field.

He harnessed him with a light polo-saddle and a snaffle-bit, then led him out and mounted him. Toward the riding-field they went, Frog trotting along quietly with a gait that was a delight to his rider. The horse enjoyed the light saddle, and above all he liked the absence of the punishing curb to which he was accustomed.

Once on the riding-field, Scott slipped his feet out of the stirrups and put Frog through his paces and over the hurdles with no difficulty. Frog was wise in the ways of riders; and he knew that the man on his back had a firm seat, and that any attempt to unseat him would be futile until he was lulled into a sense of false security by the docile actions of his mount. He obeyed the orders given him by the lieutenant's spurs and reins, and bided his time.

Lieutenant Lacey rode past Scott and called to him. Scott reined in Frog and turned on his saddle to speak to the adjutant. This was the chance for which Frog had been waiting, and he stealthily crouched lower and lower. Like a spring his muscles contracted and then, like a spring uncoiling, he leaped straight forward, covering fifteen feet in one mighty bound.

This was the trick which had won him his nickname, and it had usually unseated his rider. But Frog had not reckoned with the skill of the man astride him. Scott slid back to the horse's croup, but he held his balance and scrambled back into the saddle as Frog hit the ground and gathered himself for a buck. A dozen vicious bucks and a sunfish failed to rid him of his rider, and then a quirt bit into Frog's flank. He reared up and went over backwards, but his rider jumped clear. As Frog scrambled to his feet, Scott vaulted upon his back and drove his spurs deep into the horse's flanks.

Frog kicked violently, and turned his head, trying to seize Scott's knee in his teeth, but the punishing quirt smote him on the nose. With a scream of rage he grasped the bit in his teeth and bolted. Twice he tore around the field at full speed, and then the quirt fell on his flank again. Frog stopped with a sudden jar and reared to throw himself over backwards again. This time the loaded end of the quirt hit him between the ears and he went forward, groggy. He tried to grab the bit in his teeth again, but there was an iron hand on the reins and he could not reach it. Once more he essayed to buck, but the spurs struck home and he stopped, trembling, and waited for what might come.

As soon as Frog stood, Scott vaulted lightly from his back and approached his head. Frog laid his ears flat and bared his teeth, but the lieutenant laughed softly, grasped his lower jaw, and drew his head down.

" Steady, boy! " he said sternly. " What are you raising such a rumpus about? Behave yourself now."

The voice was friendly, and although Frog quivered a little as Scott's hand sought his nose, he stood waiting for his punishment. To his surprise, no punishment came. Instead of striking him, Scott stroked his nose gently, rubbed his ears, and then deliberately turned his back on him and walked off.

Frog could not understand such treatment. Always before, one of his outbursts had been the signal for the arrival of men armed with pitchforks, who had beaten him severely. Here was a man who had not only been able to keep his seat against the worst that Frog could do, but also one who harbored no resentment against him. When the lieutenant remounted and rode him slowly around the field until he was dry, then took him to the corral, curried him carefully, and gave him a lump of sugar, Frog realized that Lieutenant Scott was different from the men who had tried vainly to master him.

" I rather expect that will be the end of the fireworks," Scott said to the admiring Lacey as they walked out of the corral together. " Tomorrow I'll take a stick and start making a polo pony out of him."

But Scott had reckoned without full knowledge of Frog's nature. For years the horse had been master of the men who had ridden him, and he did not mean to give up that supremacy without an effort. He might let Scott ride him for the exercise he got out of it, but he wanted it clearly understood that he was merely allowing himself to be ridden, and that the ride would end when Frog wished it to and not when the rider decided it would.

Scott was wise in the ways of horses, especially bad horses, and during the next two months Frog failed to unseat him. He taught the horse a great deal about polo, but at the end of that time he felt that he would never dare use him in a game where his attention would have to be on the ball and not on the horse, for every relaxation of the eternal vigilance he kept over his mount had resulted in a battle royal between them.

" I'm afraid that I'm beaten by a horse for once," he confided to Captain Kildare, captain of the Nineteenth's polo squad. " I can ride Frog all right, if I keep my attention on him, but all the time I know that he's just waiting for a chance to police me."

" He's plain mean," replied Kildare. " I tried him out and gave him up a year ago, and Glover's manhandling of him since didn't improve his temper any. I don't think that anyone will ever win his affection or make him dependable."

"I'll try him for another month and then, if he keeps the same attitude, I'll turn him back and let someone else tackle him. He's the fastest and sturdiest horse we have, and he can turn around on a dime and hand you back a nickel change, but I know when I'm licked."

Scott rode Frog daily, striving by kindness, firmness, and every trick known to horsemanship to win him over, but he was forced to confess at the end of the time he had allowed himself that he did not dare relax his vigilance for a moment while he was mounted. He turned the horse back to Sergeant Baker and made a report to Colonel Bennitt. Since no other officer of the Nineteenth cared to try the task at which Scott had failed, Frog was duly listed as incorrigible and waited only for the next visit of the inspector to be condemned and shot.

The inspector came and started on his duties. Frog's doom was to be settled the next day. Scott paid the horse a visit, and his conscience smote him as he looked at the beautiful lines and intelligent head of the animal. He saddled him and rode him again, but at the end of an hour turned him back, announcing that, as far as he was concerned, the case was hopeless.

A dance in honor of the visitor was at its height in the Officer's Club when the dull boom of the saluting-gun stopped the music and brought the officers to their feet, wondering as to the cause of the alarm. Their wonder was of short duration, for from the guard house and barracks the notes of fire-call sounded on the night air. Lieutenant Lacey rushed in from the telephone.

"The stables, gentlemen!" he cried. "Troop commanders will bring their organizations down on the double; junior officers will report to the scene of the fire."

Scott was the first of the officers to arrive at the burning stables and he sought out Sergeant Baker.

"Are all the horses out?" he asked.

"All out, sir, except three that are in the far corner of headquarters stable. No one can face that furnace."

The dry season was at its height in the Canal Zone. For four long, weary months no rain had given relief to the parched savannas. The cattle were dying of starvation on the ranges, and even the jungle swamps had dried out until the pack-trains could travel over the trails without encountering fetlock-deep mud. The grass and brush were dead and the buildings were as dry as a bleached bone. As Scott looked at the tinder-dry building which had flared up like oil-soaked paper, he realized the truth of Baker's statement. The headquarters stable was a seething mass of flames, and it seemed certain that no one could enter that roaring furnace and hope to live. The collapse of the roof was only a matter of moments and Scott marvelled that it had not already fallen.

As he stood there helpless, awaiting the arrival of the cavalry fire engines, the despairing scream of a trapped horse in an agony of fear struck his ears. Scott loved horses, and that wail of despair seemed to make an icy hand clutch at his heart and to chill the very marrow in his bones. He shuddered, and plugged his ears with his fingers, but the scream came again. With a start, Scott recognized the horse's voice.

" Frog! " he muttered.

He hesitated for a moment and then, as the scream rose a third time on the night air, he ran to the watering trough and leaped in. In a moment he was soaked to the skin. Dripping with water, he climbed from the trough and rushed headlong toward the burning building.

Frog had been awakened, with the other horses, by the acrid smell of smoke and the sight of flames flickering around the roof of the building. The tumult they had promptly raised had awakened the stablemen and resulted in the turning in of the alarm. Bravely the stable orderlies had gone into the burning building, and horse after horse had been blindfolded and led out to safety. But the flames had gained headway rapidly, and Sergeant Baker reluctantly ordered his men to cease their efforts and leave the last three horses to their fate.

Frog had vainly tried to kick out the door of his box stall, but it was too heavy for him to break. He strove to leap into the next stall, but there was no room for a take-off, and his efforts to climb out had been a failure. He raised his voice and cried out his fear, but no one heard or heeded. Aimlessly he charged about the narrow confines of the stall, kicking and crying out.

Suddenly the door flew open and a white-clad figure leaped into the stall, tearing off his coat as he did so. Frenzied with fear, Frog charged his rescuer, but he was met with a blow of a fist on the nose and a calm voice spoke.

" Steady, boy, steady! " it said.

The voice was familiar and Frog paused for an instant. In another moment the wet coat was over his head, shutting out the fearful sight of the flames and a well-known hand was on his mane, guiding him to safety.

A cheer broke from the watching soldiers as Scott led the horse from the doomed building, and none too soon, for a crash behind him told of the falling roof which shut off any further chance for rescues.

"Scott," cried Lacey, rushing up to him, "the telephone lines are down. Mount and ride all you know to Camp Gaillard and order their engine out. The storehouse will go in a few minutes if we don't get help."

Scott saluted, tore the coat from Frog's head and leaped upon him barebacked. Frog snorted and hesitated for a moment as the flames became visible, but the rider was familiar, and his voice was soothing. Besides, he ordered Frog to do just what he wished to do—leave that neighborhood in a hurry. Out of the corral like an arrow he flashed, his rider leaning forward over his neck and begging him for more speed. On through the night he thundered through Golden Green and up the Culebra Hill. As they reached the Camp Gaillard fire house, Scott placed his hands on Frog's neck and vaulted safely to the ground. Frog checked his gait, stopped and waited while the lieutenant hastily gave the orders which turned out the already-hitched fire engine and started it at a gallop toward Empire.

The two heavy fire horses drew the engine rapidly, but past them like a streak, flew Scott and Frog. On down the road and into the corral they raced, carrying the welcome word that help was at hand.

" Mr. Scott," cried Colonel Bennitt, " ride back to meet them and lead them over to the warehouse; tell them to turn their streams on the roof and try to keep the flames from spreading."

The shortest route led close by the remains of the headquarters stable, and without thought, Scott directed Frog toward it.

Frog hesitated for a moment and then, at an encouraging word from Scott, he charged forward, leaped over a burning timber, and passed the smoldering heap so close that Scott's white trousers were scorched. The oncoming engine was intercepted and directed to its position, and Scott returned to his former station to receive further orders. Another rafter had fallen and Frog had two burning barriers to face. He leaped each without hesitation and came to a stop before the colonel and the inspector.

" Where did you get that horse, Mr. Scott? " asked the inspector, a few moments later.

" He's a government horse, sir, one of my polo string. I mean he was one of my polo string. He is up before you for condemnation tomorrow for viciousness."

" If you can ride him around barebacked like that, he can't be so very vicious," remarked the inspector.

" I'll show you, sir," replied Scott. He deliberately raised his right leg and sat sideways on the horse, entirely helpless against a buck. This was the chance for which Frog had been waiting for three months. He stealthily gathered his muscles for a buck.

" Steady, boy," said a quiet voice in his ear and a soothing hand caressed his neck.

Gradually the horse relaxed his muscles and his ears perked upright. His drawn-back lips relaxed to cover his teeth and Frog turned his head and rubbed his nose gently against the lieutenant's knee.

" See, sir? " cried Scott in triumph, as he stroked the outstretched nose. " He's as gentle as a baby."

" So I see," replied the inspector. " I think he's safe tomorrow. He's not only gentle, he's also the nerviest pony I have ever seen."

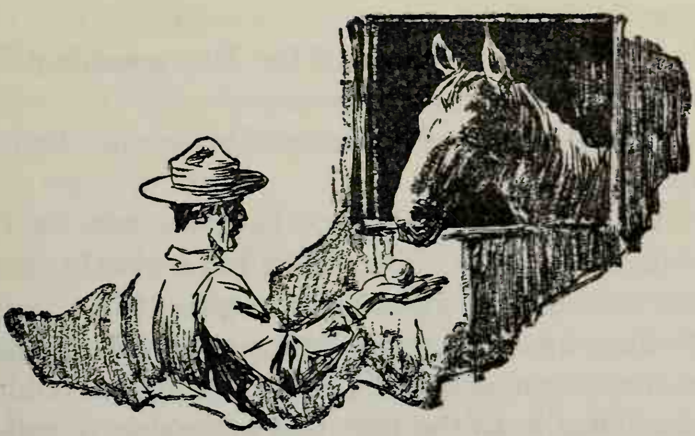
" Wait until you see us on the polo-field, sir," said Scott happily, as he stroked Frog's neck. " This horse has brains as well as nerve. We'll show you some real polo when we get going! "

A few yards behind Scott and the inspector, two enlisted men had been deeply interested spectators of the scene. As Frog relaxed his muscles and turned to nuzzle his master, Sergeant Winsoton gave vent to a series of sounds meant to express extreme joy.

" I told you so, you old owl, I told you so! " he cried joyfully as he pounded Sergeant Baker on the back. " He's got Frog eating out of his hand right now. Boy, you owe me a good dinner at the American House next payday."

" It looks like it," answered Baker thoughtfully. " If Frog still behaves by payday, I'll pay for that dinner more cheerfully than I've paid for anything for a year. But where do you get that gloat? Didn't I always say that Frog would make a wonderful polo pony if the right man ever got hold of him? "

" Aw, horsefeathers," chuckled Winsoton as he hugged himself and executed a few clumsy dance steps. " I'll take fried chicken—a double order."



III

A NIGHT ON GUARD

THE afternoon shadows were gradually lengthening over the almost deserted post of Empire. The Nineteenth Cavalry, less one troop and four officers, were out in the jungles toward Chorerra, taking part in the annual department maneuvers. Lieutenant Scott lay asleep on a bunk in the guard house in the room assigned to the Officer of the Day. Without warning a telephone bell jangled noisily at his elbow. Scott turned on his bunk and muttered uneasily in his sleep. Again the bell sent forth an insistent note and the lieutenant rolled over and took down the receiver.

" Guard house, Officer of the Day speaking," he mumbled into the mouthpiece.

" Sleepy, Scotty? " came Lieutenant Lacey's voice.

" Yes. Good and sleepy. Doggone you for disturbing me anyway. Why shouldn't a man be sleepy after four consecutive nights on guard? "

" Cheer up, old man, the first month is the hardest. Now brace yourself for a shock. Captain Kildare was coming in to the post this afternoon to relieve you, but something came up that held him out at camp. You'll have to go on again tonight."

" What? " cried the now thoroughly aroused Scott. " Another night? What's the matter anyway? Am I the only officer on the post? "

" You'll be the only one tonight, I'm afraid. I've got to ride out to the regiment or I'd take a tour for you. I'm sorry, Scotty, but it's a case of have to. The colonel thought he was leaving enough officers here to take care of everything, but Olden had to get sick and Knight was called to Quarry Heights again this afternoon, so there's no one left but you and me.

I'll tell the Old Man about the situation when I see him tonight and we'll have someone in to march on in your place tomorrow. You can manage tonight, can't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so," grumbled Scott. "Doggone maneuvers anyway. I wanted to get out into the jungles with the regiment and have some of the fun, but I had to be picked to stay here and ride guard every night."

"All right, old man, thanks. I'll have a relief for you by guard mount tomorrow."

Scott hung up the receiver and glanced at his wrist watch. It lacked only an hour of guard mount and with a prodigious yawn and stretch, he walked out of the guard house. He removed his campaign hat for a moment to wipe his forehead and the heat bore down on him like a weight. He hurriedly replaced his hat and strode to the hitching rack where Chocolate, one of his mounts, switched a lazy tail at the buzzing flies.

"Pretty warm, isn't it, old fellow?" he said to the horse as he untied the halter-shank and looped it to the pommel rings of his saddle. He vaulted lightly onto the pony's back and rode at a walk up the road toward the bachelor quarters.

Half an hour later he emerged from the shower bath and donned a fresh uniform. A drumming of hoofs outside his quarters attracted his attention and he looked out. An orderly had just tied Frog to the hitching rack and was leading Chocolate away for a night of rest. Scott procured a slice of fresh pineapple from the refrigerator and walked out to his mount. Frog whickered with joy as he saw his master coming and craned his neck for the delicacy he saw in Scott's hand.

Scott gave him the fruit and stroked his neck while he ate it. In the month that had passed since the fateful night when he had led Frog from the burning stable, a deep and abiding understanding and affection had grown up between the two. Frog's sudden surrender had caught Scott by surprise. He was pleased at the first sign of progress with the horse, but he had expected long, weary months of patient work before he could fully trust Frog. Here, however, he had reckoned without full knowledge of the horse's nature. There was nothing half-way about Frog. Once he had given in, he did it completely and bestowed on his adopted master a deep, fierce loyalty that amazed Scott, horseman that he was.

From the direction of the guard house came the notes of "guard mount." Scott vaulted into his saddle and rode toward the parade ground. He rapidly inspected the new guard and watched it relieve the old one. As the ceremony ended, a group of seven men formed in column and rode off. They had gone only a few yards when Scott called to them.

"Corporal Evans!"

The non-commissioned officer in command of the detail reined in his horse and saluted.

"You're in comand of the subpost at Las Cascadas tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"When I inspected there last night, Corporal Brandt told me that there was a big tiger cat working in around the post. One of the sentries on Post Number Two must have run into it, for his horse bolted and nearly ran down the canal bank. Brandt telephoned me this morning that he had found the tracks and that it's a doggone big one. It isn't to be wondered at for Las Cascadas hasn't been garrisoned for nearly two years, but it doesn't make the matter any more pleasant. I hardly think that even a big cat would attack a sentry, but if a horse really bolted in some of those narrow places on the road, it might be a serious matter. See that your men are warned to keep their eyes open and a tight hand on their reins."

"Yes, sir."

"All right, that's all. I'll see you some time tonight. I'd like to get up there early and look the ground over while it's light, but I've got to meet the trains every couple of hours until twelve-thirty. I don't expect any trouble, but no one would better go to sleep on post tonight, even if he has had more than his share of guard duty."

"No, sir."

The corporal barked an order and the detail moved off at a trot along the four mile road which separated Empire from Las Cascadas, an old abandoned construction town which had done duty as a military post during the crowded days of the World War.

Scott attended to the posting of the new relief and then rode to the empty Officers' Club for supper. The evening meal finished, he rode around the posts of the guard at Empire and met the incoming trains. The last train left a half hour after midnight. When it pulled out, Scott mounted with a sigh and turned Frog's head toward Las Cascadas.

The road to the subpost coincided with the road to the corral for a quarter of a mile and Frog stepped briskly along toward his stall. At the road fork, Scott turned him to the right and Frog stopped in midstride. Scott shook the reins impatiently but Frog whirled about in his tracks and took the left road toward the corral and bed.

"Whoa, boy!" cried Scott in surprise as he tightened the reins. "You aren't turning in yet, you're going to Cascadas. Come around here!"

Obedient to the pressure on the reins, Frog turned, but after a few steps along the right hand road, he whirled suddenly and strove once more to head back toward the corral. Scott vaulted to the ground and approached the horse's head.

"I'm sorry, old fellow," he said as he stroked Frog's nose. "I reckon you're just as tired and sleepy as I am after four straight nights of this, but you're in the army now and you've got eight miles ahead of you before you go to bed."

He caressed the horse's head for a moment. Frog shoved his velvety muzzle into the lieutenant's chest and nuzzled against him. With a final pat, Scott vaulted into the saddle and turned his mount toward the distant subpost. Frog made a half-hearted attempt to go toward the corral again but the firm pressure on the reins told him of the futility of such a move and he settled down to a fast, tireless walk toward Las Cascadas.

The moon was not up and the black, velvety darkness was so thick that Scott could barely make out the road beneath his horse's feet. After a few moments of effort, he gave up the task of guiding him and allowed Frog to pick his own way through the night.

They had covered half the distance before Frog suddenly stopped, his ears erect. He sniffed the air inquiringly and snorted his disgust at the odor which the wind brought to his sensitive nostrils. Scott quickly drew the automatic pistol which hung at his belt while he groped with his other hand for his flashlight.

" What is it, old fellow? " he asked softly.

Frog snorted in reply. In response to the pressure of Scott's knees, he took a few steps forward. He paused again, trembling slightly, and pawed the ground. There was a rustle in the thick jungle undergrowth which encroached on the little-used road. Frog stopped dead in his tracks and Scott strained his eyes through the darkness, hoping for a sight of whatever was frightening his horse.

The rustle came again and a beam of light from Scott's flashlight stabbed the darkness. A speck of green light showed for an instant in the beam, but before Scott could level his pistol and fire, it was gone. A heavy body crashed through the undergrowth. The sound died away and quiet reined in the jungle. In the distance a fox howled mournfully. There was a sudden burst of noise from the near-by jungle as a troop of monkeys awoke and scampered away through the treetops with shrill chatterings of fear. Frog's tension relaxed and he snorted again, this time in a tone of relief.

"Has he gone, Frog?" asked Scott. "It's too bad he didn't stay put long enough for me to get a shot at him. Well, let's move out."

He slipped his pistol back into its holster and urged Frog forward. The horse hesitated no longer, but started again his distance-eating walk along the road. For half an hour they made their way through the darkness before another interruption came.

"Halt! Who's there?" came a sharp voice through the darkness.

"Officer of the Day," replied Scott, bringing Frog to a halt.

"Advance, Officer of the Day, and be recognized."

Scott rode forward to find the sentry with his hand at salute.

"Hello, Corcoran," he said. "Any alarms tonight?"

"No, sir. Everything has been quiet."

"No signs of that cat that was reported?"

"Not on this post, sir."

"I met something a couple of miles down the road, but it got out of my light before I could shoot. Well, keep your eyes open. I'm going on and inspect Number Three."

"Yes, sir."

The sentry on Post Number Three also reported that there had been no alarms and Scott rode to the guard house of the subpost to talk with Corporal Evans. Satisfied that everything was quiet and that the guard were performing their duties properly, he remounted half an hour later and turned Frog's head toward Empire, smothering a yawn as he did so.

As he rode along through the pitchy darkness with nothing to do, sleepiness came down on him with overwhelming force. Several times he caught himself nodding. Each time he straightened up, and by the way Frog jumped when he shifted his position in the saddle, Scott had a shrewd suspicion that the horse had also been stealing a few winks of sleep.

At last he felt that he could stand it no longer. He knotted his reins and hung them on the pommel of his saddle, slipped his feet out of the stirrups and allowed them to dangle, folded his arms across his breast, and allowed himself to relax. Heavier and heavier grew his eyelids. He came to several times with a start, but each time he relaxed again. Finally his head sank forward on his chest and he dropped off into a sound and dreamless slumber. Five straight nights on guard had been too much for him.

Frog's head hung lower as his master's drooped. Gradually he subsided into a state of only half-wakefulness and moved along toward the corral, waking only when an irregularity in the road made him stumble.

There was a sudden rustle in the undergrowth by the side of the road. Frog started into full wakefulness. As he did so, there was a crash as though a heavy body were tearing through the thick-twined jungle. Frog gave a start. Without conscious thought he made a sudden bound straight forward, covering fifteen feet in one tremendous leap. It was the trick which had gained him his name.

Ordinarily such a trick would merely have settled Scott more firmly in his saddle, but this time he was caught completely off guard. His flat polo saddle had no cantle worth mentioning and his feet were not in his stirrups. As a result, Frog shot forward, but Scott did not. He slid back over the horse's crupper and landed on his back in the road. His head snapped back and struck a rock. For a moment, all the stars in the universe whirled in dizzy circles before his eyes, and then he felt himself falling—falling—falling ——

Frog felt his rider leave the saddle, and he stopped where he landed on his jump. No welcome voice came to him from his master, and he whirled about, teeth bared, and hoofs ready for battle. From the undergrowth came a continued crashing, and a dark body emerged into the road. The wind veered and

Frog relaxed with a snort of disgust. The intruder was nothing but a pack mule who had broken from the corral.

As Frog advanced, the mule threw up his heels in a playful kick and raced down the road toward Las Cascadas. He had learned long ago to associate cavalry charges with men, and men, he knew, meant the speedy end of his stolen freedom.

Frog approached Scott who lay prostrate on the ground, and nuzzled him eagerly. When his master did not respond, he whickered softly, and then more loudly. There was no response from the quiet, relaxed figure. Frog nuzzled him again and whinnied his loudest. Still Scott did not move. Frog raised one hoof and pawed gently at the prostrate form.

Again and again the horse walked around the man on the ground, calling to him, nuzzling him, and pawing him, in turn. Once he grasped Scott's arm in his teeth and strove to lift him. Scott's shirt gave with a loud rip, and Frog sprang back in alarm. With a final whicker, he turned and with the flying stirrups continually urging him to greater speed, he tore along the road toward Empire.

Scott came slowly back to consciousness. He could not place himself for a few moments. His head ached splittingly, and he rolled over with a groan.

The rocks of the road beneath him made him realize that something was wrong. He sat up with an effort, raised his hands to his aching head. His fingers encountered something warm, wet, sticky. He drew back his hand and sniffed inquiringly at his fingers.

" Blood! " he exclaimed.

The start which the scent of blood gave him brought his wandering sense back with a jerk. He staggered to his feet. The darkness was intense and he could not see ten feet in any direction. He felt himself carefully over and found that no bones were broken. Aside from a jagged cut on the back of his head and a few bruises, he could find nothing wrong.

His head was still bleeding slightly. He ripped open the first-aid packet which hung at his belt and bound up his head as well as he could in the darkness. His canteen had remained on his saddle and there was no water nearer than the canal, which lay far below him in the Culebra Cut.

" I wonder just where I am," he muttered as he held his buzzing head with both hands. " Oh, yes, I remember now. I was coming home from Cascadas . . . and I fell asleep. Frog must have taken advantage of it to police me. Doggone the horse, I didn't think it of him. I thought he was a friend of mine. Maybe he was only playing. Wonder how long I've been out? I must have hit my head an awful wallop. If Frog was playing, he ought to be sticking around to get his laugh when I woke up."

He felt in his pocket and drew out his whistle. He raised it to his lips and a shrill rattle sounded through the night, stilling like magic the night noises of the jungle. There was no response and Scott whistled again.

"Frog!" he called sharply. "Come here and quit your monkey business!"

He waited and listened, but there was no welcome sound of Frog's whicker or the pounding of hoofs which he more than half expected to hear. Scott suddenly felt as though he had lost his best friend.

"Doggone that pony," he said, more in grief than in anger. "I've worked for months with him and I'd have sworn on a stack of Bibles a mile high that he was as fond of me as I was of him. Here he goes and polices me the first time I go to sleep and give him a chance. To top it all, he runs away and leaves me to walk home. Hello, what's this?"

The flapping of his torn sleeve attracted his attention. With the aid of his flashlight he examined the tear. On the arm underneath were the unmistakeable marks of a horse's teeth. Thoroughly aroused, the lieutenant opened his shirt and examined the bruises he felt on his chest. The marks of a horseshoe were painfully evident.

“ Why, he must have attacked me after I was down,” he exclaimed in profound astonishment. “ I would never have believed it of Frog. Doggone it, I don’t believe it now. There’s something funny about this. Well, there’s only one thing to do and that’s join the Infantry and walk home. I hope it’s not far to the post.”

Slipping his light back into his pocket, Scott started a weary march toward Empire. The road was a rocky one and riding boots are not designed for walking. After a few steps he paused and removed his spurs. This helped some but his muscles were sore and he staggered along, only half aware of what he was doing.

He had covered a quarter of a mile when a sound in the distance made him pause. Along the road from Empire, horses were coming. There were three of them, by the sound, and they were coming rapidly. Scott stopped where he was and waited. The sound came nearer and the horses swung around a turn in the road. Scott could see flashlights sweeping the road.

“ Hello! ” he called.

“ Yes, sir! ” came an answer, but it was drowned in the happy whinny of an excited horse. One of the horses broke from the oncoming party and came forward at a run. Before Scott he came to a stop and Frog nuzzled his master joyously, whickering his satisfaction. Scott drew back from him.

" What are you making such a fuss about? " he demanded sternly. " It strikes me that you have a lot of rapid-fire explaining to do. If you didn't deliberately police me, and then bite and paw me on top of it, at least you ran away and left me instead of standing by. Haven't I trained you to stand when I'm off you? "

The horse crowded closer to him, rubbing his velvety muzzle against Scott's cheek. Sergeant Baker and an orderly, dressed only in undershirts and fatigue trousers, rode up and dismounted.

" Are you hurt, Lieutenant? " asked the sergeant anxiously.

" No, not much. A little shaken and a cut on the back of my head. How did you know I was out here? "

" Frog brought the word, sir. He came into the corral at a gallop and began to yell. I went out to put him up, although I was surprised because the lieutenant usually unsaddles his horse himself. Then I noticed that the reins were knotted and I thought maybe the lieutenant had sent him down from his quarters alone, that is, until I saw the stirrups. When I saw that they were flying, I knew that something was wrong. I knew where you had gone, so I routed O'Malley out and told him to saddle a couple of horses. Then I tried to unsaddle Frog and put him up, but he wouldn't let me. He kept running off down the road toward Cascadas and yelling. I knew from his actions that something serious was the matter so we took off down the road as fast as we could. Frog came along with us of his own accord."

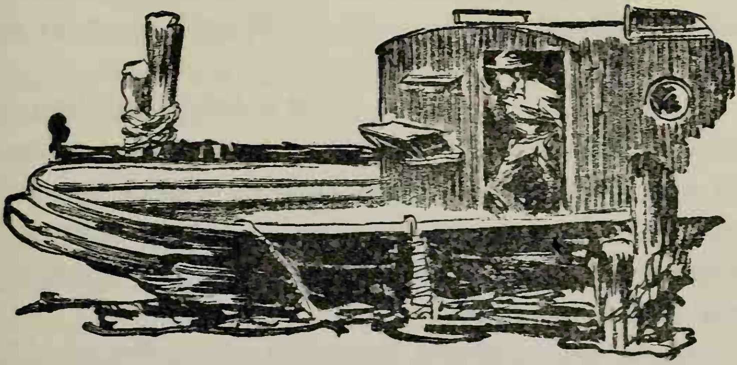
A wave of remorse gripped Scott.

" Doggone it, pony," he cried to Frog, " I can see just what happened now. I fell off and hit my head and you didn't know what to do. You nipped me and pawed me and tried every way you knew to rouse me. When you couldn't, you went home hot-foot to get help. Come here, pony."

Frog whickered and nuzzled him affectionately. Scott threw his arms around the horse's neck and kissed his velvety muzzle.

" I knew deep down in my heart that you wouldn't turn me down, old fellow," he said, his voice strangely husky. " Pony, I'm going to buy you six pineapples tomorrow morning and feed you every one of them, even if you have tummy-ache for a week from it."

" And I think I'll buy Tubby Winsoton another dinner, double order of chicken and all, just as soon as he gets back from those maneuvers," chuckled Baker to O'Malley as they fell in behind Scott to ride back to the post. " Frog is not only eating out of the lieutenant's hand now; in another month he'll be climbing up into his lap and purring, or I miss my guess. I always said he'd be a good horse with a good man ahold of him."



IV

A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY

SCOTT laid a restraining hand on the pommel of Frog's saddle. The horse checked his gait instantly, and came to a halt as the lieutenant vaulted from his back in front of headquarters building.

"Stay here until I come back, old fellow," Scott said as he dropped his mount's reins to the ground. Frog thrust his velvet muzzle into Scott's hand and nuzzled him gently. Scott petted him for a moment, then turned and entered the building. He came to a halt before the adjutant's desk.

"Oh, hello, Scotty," said Lieutenant Lacey, looking up. "I wanted to see you."

"So I gathered from what your orderly said," admitted Scott with a grin. "What's on your alleged mind, if anything?"

Lacey did not smile at Scott's infectious humor. Instead he cast a swift, half-anxious glance around his office. The half-dozen enlisted clerks were all bent over their desks, apparently deeply engrossed in the work before them. Nevertheless, Lacey spoke in a guarded undertone.

"Come into Colonel Bennitt's office, Scotty," he said. "He's not there, and we can talk with less chance of being overheard."

The mystified Scott, his face sober now, followed the adjutant into the vacant inner office.

"What's it all about, Lacey?" he asked. "It must be something pretty doggone secret for you to take all these precautions."

"It is, Scotty," replied Lacey gravely. "So secret that there are only two persons in the regiment, Colonel Bennitt and myself, who know of it. The fact that I'm adding a third on the Old Man's orders shows what he thinks of your discretion."

Scott colored slightly at the compliment implied in Lacey's words. The adjutant knelt before a safe and carefully twirled the dial. When the door swung open, he took out a cable form from an inner drawer and handed it to Scott.

Scott unfolded it and stared at a meaningless jumble of letters, divided into ten-letter groups. There was, to him, not the slightest trace of meaning in the gibberish.

“ What’s this? ” he asked. “ Code? ”

“ No, cipher,” Lacey replied. “ It’s one that I’ll defy the best cryptographer in the world to break in less than a week, and he won’t break it then unless he has some sort of a clue to the construction, or a good many more words than that message contains.”

Scott looked at the jumble of letters with fresh respect.

“ But I thought our codes were rather simple,” he said. “ I know how to use the cipher disc, but I always understood that any expert could read that stuff with little trouble.”

“ He could, but this isn’t a simple substitution cipher where one letter or symbol stands for another. Ciphers of that sort are elementary. This is a modification of the ‘ Playfair ’ cipher.* It is a cipher that a man can keep in his head and reconstruct in a few minutes, yet it is almost impossible to read a message written by its use. This particular cipher happens to be individual between myself and one man in the Military Intelligence Division at Washington, and the key word is changed every two months, so there is never very much of it in existence. But I didn't get you in here to give you a lesson in the construction and translation of cipher messages. Here's a translation that I made in English. Read it to yourself until you are sure of it, and then I'll destroy it."

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* See Appendix A.

Scott took the translation, which was written in Lacey's handwriting. His eyebrows went up as he took in its meaning. He read it carefully through three times before he handed it back.

" I've got it," he said.

" Good," replied Lacey. He struck a match and burned the paper, then ground the ashes into bits before he went on. " Now repeat it to me."

Scott shut his eyes a moment in thought.

" ' Intelligence Officer, Empire, Canal Zone,' " he said. " ' Thoroughly authenticated reports indicate that a foreign secret agent has enlisted for cavalry, your station. No name or description of man can be furnished, but he is one of your recruits who arrived last transport. Only information available is that he was at one time cavalry officer in foreign power. Locate him at once and see that he has no opportunity of securing confidential information. He is thought to be agent of friendly power, so case must be handled with great care to avoid diplomatic friction.' It was signed 'MI-21.' "

"Right," answered Lacey. "Now you can see what we're up against."

"I do, but would you mind telling me where I cut in on the deal?"

"It's going to be your job to locate him. Those recruits are still undergoing elementary riding instruction. Now, if this man we're looking for is an ex-cavalry officer, sooner or later he's going to give himself away by knowing too much. You are to circulate quietly around the drill-field and watch. The colonel picked you because you're the best judge of a horse—and a horseman—in the regiment."

"That's a sweet assignment," answered Scott. "There are a good many men who know how to ride pretty well, you know."

"Yes, but how many of them, even if they have ridden for years, have a military seat?"

"Not many, I'll admit. All right, I'll try to find him. What shall I do then? Arrest him?"

"By no means. Remember the last sentence of that message. The case must be handled with gloves. That's really the crux of the whole problem. After you locate the man, you must figure out some way to render him harmless, without starting any trouble."

"Do I have to do that too?"

" Looks like it, Scotty. The Old Man said to put you in charge of the affair."

" All right, Lacey, I'll do my best."

Lacey relocked the cable in the colonel's safe, and the two men left the office. Scott mounted his waiting horse and rode slowly out along the Paja Road, turning his new assignment over in his mind.

" I hope we can do it, pony," he said as he absent-mindedly stroked Frog's satiny neck, " but it's not going to be an easy drill. Well, stand by, old fellow. I'm going to call on you to help me out if I get stuck."

The next morning Scott rode out to the drill-field, and sat his horse quietly, watching the recruits of the various troops going through their basic training in horsemanship. Within ten minutes he had spotted one man who rode with every appearance of having had many years of experience with horses behind him, and in an hour he had found another who seemed to know rather too much for a raw recruit. Although he watched all the rest of the drill period, he saw nothing else that was at all out of the ordinary. That night he reported his first day's results to Lacey.

" The only two men who look as if they knew the off side of a horse from the near side are Massini of

F Troop, and Walton of B. Both of them have had more than a little riding, or I miss my guess pretty badly."

Lacey gave a wry smile.

"I wish it was that simple, Scotty," he said. "I went over the service records of all the recruits last night, and Massini has served three years in the Italian cavalry. Those Italian fellows can do some pretty slick riding, you know, so that accounts for him. Walton put in four years in the First Illinois Cavalry of our own national guard, so it is natural that he knows something of military riding. What you've got to look for is something more subtle, something that crops out suddenly, and then is gone."

"Have any of the rest any previous cavalry service?"

"No, you picked the only two."

"Well, that helps, anyway. Of course, the man we're looking for might have given some such record as Massini did, just to avoid suspicion."

"Yes, that's possible," Lacey admitted. "It won't do any harm to watch both Massini and Walton pretty carefully, but meanwhile, keep your eyes open and see if you can't locate something else."

"I will. By the way, two of the recruits weren't out to drill today."

"Which two?"

"Sturgis of A Troop, and Ryan of my own."

"Sturgis is in the hospital. The first day out he tried to mount from the off side, and got pitched on his head. He has a broken collar-bone and he'll be laid up for a week."

"That lets him out, then. How about Ryan?"

"He's working in my office. He's an excellent typist, and we're so short of clerical men in the outfit that I let him off recruit training for the present and drafted him right into the personnel section."

"Better send him out to drill. I can't tell much about his horsemanship if he stays in your office and punches a typewriter all day."

"Oh, you needn't worry about Ryan, Scotty. He's an old-timer. Got wounded twice overseas, and has a splendid record. He's above suspicion."

"No one's above suspicion in a case like this. You ought to send him out."

"But I can't spare him."

Scott shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you're the boss, Lacey, but it puts me in a hole. I am supposed to tell you which of the recruits, if any, have handled a horse before, yet one of them can't be sent out to drill because he's got to be a clerk before he's a cavalryman."

Lacey laughed ruefully.

" You win, Scotty," he said. " I can't spare him, but I'll have to. He'll be out to drill tomorrow."

By the end of a month, when the elementary instruction of the recruits was over and they were returned to their troops for full duty, Scott had spotted two more men who seemed to know more about horses than their service records indicated. However, when questioned, both of them admitted that they were raised on farms and had done a certain amount of riding. There was nothing else on which to base more than the vaguest suspicion. Scott went again to Lacey to report progress.

" The only men who have shown the least familiarity with horses are Massini, Walton, Smith, and Carruthers," he said. " All of them came by their knowledge honestly, so far as I can tell. However, I wish that you'd have them all transferred to my troop so that I can keep my eye on them. Mind you, I don't suspect any of them; least of all Massini, who is the best rider in the group; but they are the only possibilities, and I'd like to watch them a little longer before I give up the job."

" All right, Scotty, I'll have the orders issued tomorrow. How did my clerk, Ryan, pan out? "

Scott laughed.

" He's hopeless," he declared. " He doesn't know a curb bit from a snaffle, and I don't think he'll ever learn. If he's really a good clerk, I suppose we can keep him in the regiment, but otherwise I'd recommend his transfer to an infantry regiment at once."

"Lay off my office men," Lacey said. "Ryan's worth a dozen ordinary clerks, and he'll never have to ride."

"He'll have to turn out to troop drill at least once a week until I pronounce him proficient, even if you have to shut your precious office up on those days."

Another month passed, and Scott was forced to admit that he was no nearer a solution of the problem than he had been on the first day. The four men who had been transferred to his troop were all developing into expert cavalrymen, and Scott knew that unless he obtained his information quickly, the plan which had seemed so simple when Lacey had first outlined it, would fail. Given another month or two of regular troop drill, and the men would be finished enough riders that nothing they could do would be enough to warrant suspicion. He must act quickly, or give up the job as hopeless—and it was not Scott's habit to admit defeat.

Long and earnestly he turned the problem over in his mind, and then mounted Frog and rode out of the post toward the Canal Zone boundary line. He turned off the main road onto a jungle trail, and followed it until he came to an open savanna that he knew of. There he dismounted and taking Frog by the bridle, spoke to him earnestly.

" Pony," he said, " I'm stuck. Stuck dead. I told you once before that if I got in that condition, I was going to holler to you for help. Will you give me a lift? "

Frog dropped his velvet muzzle into Scott's hand and rubbed against him gently.

" Sure, I knew you would," Scott assured him. " All right, here is where you add another trick to your education."

He remounted and rode slowly forward, revolving in his mind the best way to start the new training. At last he was satisfied with the plan that was outlined in his brain, and he touched Frog lightly with his spur.

An hour later he rode back toward Empire, confident that his mount had learned the lesson. Twice during the return ride he tested him, and found the horse's reaction perfect. He chuckled to himself as he turned Frog into the corral.

" I think that tomorrow will tell the tale, old fellow," he said as he stroked Frog's nose. " If you'll just remember what I taught you this afternoon, and do it at the right time."

The following afternoon he rode up to headquarters and dismounted.

" Now, don't forget, Frog," was his parting admonition to his mount as he left him standing in the road, the reins dropped to the ground.

" Say, Lacey," he demanded as he faced the adjutant. " What are you going to do about that last shipment of forage? "

Lacey looked up in surprise.

" What forage? " he asked. " I haven't heard anything about it."

" Didn't you get that letter I wrote this morning? "

" No."

" That's funny. I wrote you a letter this morning, and attached an inspection report to it. It must still be down at the orderly room." He looked around the office. " Oh, Ryan," he said, " will you please go down to the orderly room and ask the first sergeant for that letter I wrote about forage this morning? "

The clerk jumped to his feet and reached for his hat.

" And hurry, please. Take my horse, Frog. He's waiting at the door."

" Yes, sir."

Ryan saluted and was gone. Scott turned back to Lacey.

" Come over to the window," he said. " There's something I want to show you."

The adjutant rose and followed him to the window. Ryan was just mounting Frog.

" Clerk or no clerk," Scott exclaimed in disgust, " do you think that man will ever be anything but a disgrace to a cavalry outfit? "

" Maybe not, as far as riding goes," Lacey admitted, " but he's worth a dozen of your hard-riding bullies up here."

Scott gave a non-committal grunt. Suddenly he threw open the window. Ryan was fifty yards away.

" Oh, Ryan! " he called.

The private reined in Frog and turned on his saddle to look back toward the caller. As he did so, Frog squatted down a trifle, and then without warning shot through the air in a fifteen-foot jump. It was his old trick. Ryan was thrown back on the cantle of the saddle, but his knees clamped together and he retained his seat. Frog landed running. Ryan swayed limply on the saddle a moment, and then one foot flew free from its stirrup. The private dropped the reins and clung to Frog's mane with both hands, swaying and jolting in the saddle as the horse raced down the road toward the corral. Lacey gave vent to a snort.

" No, you're right, Scotty," he said. " Ryan will never make a cavalryman."

In Scott's eyes was a gleam of satisfaction. He caught Lacey by the arm and drew him into the inner office.

" Lacey," he said quietly, " Ryan's your man."

" What man? "

" Your foreign agent."

The adjutant laughed.

" Nonsense, Scotty," he said. " Why, I'd as soon suspect myself as Ryan. He's been in our army for six years and he has a splendid record. No, it couldn't be Ryan. What gave you that idea? "

" What you and I just saw a few moments ago."

" I saw him give as vile an exhibition of horsemanship as I ever saw in my life."

" Was that the way you saw it? "

" Certainly. He was nearly policed, and probably will be before he reaches the corral."

" Well, I saw him give positive proof that he has ridden for years, and is a first-class rider. You noticed that when I called him, he turned in his saddle as was natural? "

" Yes."

" And that Frog immediately jumped out from under him? "

" Yes."

"Well, it took me two hours yesterday afternoon to teach Frog to jump at that signal. I knew that it would unseat anyone who wasn't a real rider. This morning I tried it on our four suspects. They are all better riders than Ryan pretends to be, yet every one of them was policed instantly. Even Massini, and he's about as good a rider as there is in the outfit, went right off. Yet Ryan, caught unawares, retained his seat."

"That was an accident, Scotty. You saw what happened a moment later. He pulled leather with both hands."

"Yes, as soon as he remembered himself. If you doubt me, get up on Frog and let me give him the signal. Even expecting it, you'll have trouble keeping your seat. Yet Ryan caught his knees and held his balance perfectly. Lacey, that man has ridden for years, and he learned his riding in a hard school."

Lacey looked suddenly thoughtful.

"You know horses and horsemen, Scotty," he said, "and if you say he is an expert rider, I'll have to take your word for it. What made you suspect him in the first place?"

"He was just a little bit too good an actor, Lacey. No man could be that dumb about a horse, and yet be smart about other things. I thought he overdid his ignorance and inability to learn to ride, so I decided to test him."

"It looks as if you win, Scotty, but you've got to get better proof than that. You can't take action against a man just because he wasn't policed by a horse, you know."

"I'll get the proof all right. I've been studying over this matter ever since you first gave me the job of running him down, and I have my plans all laid. If Ryan is the man I think he is, he'll hang himself."

"All right. Spill your idea."

Scott took a paper from his pocket.

"Read this," he said as he handed it to the adjutant. "It's a cable for Washington."

Lacey took the message. It read: "Have secured proof that Private Thomas Ryan is agent mentioned in your cable. He is under constant surveillance and every boat is being watched. Cable instructions as to where he shall be confined when arrested." He looked up at Scott.

"Well?" he asked.

"That message isn't to be sent," Scott explained. "What I want you to do is to put it in cipher, and then arrange for Ryan to see it in such a way that he won't be suspicious. If he is a secret agent, he'll be able to decipher it and read it. Then his actions will give him away. If he tries to escape, we'll have him cold."

Lacey looked up with a sudden light in his eyes.

"You should have been a diplomat, Scotty," he said admiringly. "That idea's just the ticket. It'll get rid of him without the slightest chance of diplomatic friction anywhere. Let's encipher this thing."

Scott pulled the cipher disc from his pocket, but Lacey laughed.

"You aren't going to use that thing and produce a simple substitution cipher, are you?" he enquired.

"Why not?"

"If Ryan is what you think he is, he knows a good deal about codes and ciphers, and he knows that anyone with even a little training can read a simple substitution cipher in a few minutes. It would be a dead giveaway. No, let me tackle it."

"How will you do it?"

"It's not so simple," Lacey answered. "I've got to figure out a cipher that he can break all right, and yet one that is sufficiently complex that he won't smell a rat."

He bent his head in thought.

"I have it," he said at length. "I'll use an AZBY transposition on it first, and then use a simple substitution cipher.* He can solve it if he knows anything about them, but if he isn't at least a semi-expert, it will baffle him completely."

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* See Appendix B.

Ten minutes later he laid the message before Scott.

" It's Greek to me," Scott said as he studied it. " Even though I watched you encipher it, I couldn't solve it in a month. Are you sure that he can? "

" If he knows much of anything about ciphers."

" Now, how are you going to get it before him so as not to arouse his suspicions? "

" Leave that to me, Scotty. You go back to your troop and pick out several men you can trust. Have them trail Ryan. Tell them to be very careful that he doesn't know they are doing it."

" But I want him to know he's being shadowed."

" Oh, he'll know it, all right, no matter how much they try to hide themselves."

There was a knock at the door. Lacey looked up sharply and said: " Come in." Private Ryan, his face scratched and his uniform torn and muddy, appeared in the doorway.

" What happened? " Lacey asked.

" Lieutenant Scott's horse ran away with me, sir, and threw me near the corral. I went to the orderly room and got the letter that the lieutenant wanted, and then led the horse back, sir."

He extended a letter which Scott had prepared that morning. Lacey took it from him.

" Thanks, Ryan," he said. " You'd better go up to the hospital and get those scratches fixed up."

Ryan saluted and left. Lacey turned again to Scott.

" All right, Scotty," he said. " Go and get your sleuth-hounds on the job. I'll see that Ryan has this message within an hour."

Scott watched Ryan carefully at drill the next morning. He was forced to admit after an hour of careful watching that he was either mistaken, or that Ryan was a consummate actor. There was not a trace of nervousness in the private's actions, and he handled his horse with the stupidity which had come to be linked almost inseparably with his name. It was not until the drill hour was nearly over that anything happened.

The troop was swinging out into open order, with Ryan on the left flank of the line, nearest the road. Suddenly the private's horse became unmanageable. Scott was near enough to see Ryan's face contract in fear as he grasped at his saddle and hung on frantically. He lost one stirrup and as he reached for it, he drove his spur deep into his mount's flank. This was the touch needed to start the horse off. It reared, then bolted straight up the Paja Road, reins flying wild, and foam dripping from its lips.

The first sergeant gave a shout and started to pursue, but a sharp word from Scott halted him. The lieutenant sat his horse watching Ryan until he disappeared around a bend in the road.

" That was well done," he muttered. " In fact, a trifle too well done. He never was in any danger of being policed. I wonder why he pulled that? "

He sat in thought for a moment, and then enlightenment came to him.

" Take command of the troop, Sergeant! " he shouted. He whirled his mount about and dashed away at a gallop toward the corral.

" Turn out Frog, Baker! " he cried as he thundered up to the picket line. " Light equipment, Hurry! "

Sergeants Baker and Winsoton, who had been sitting in the shade of the corral office, gave one look at Scott's face, and then sprang into action. Never had Frog been taken from the picket line and saddled in shorter time than he was that day. Hardly was the saddle cinched in place than Scott was in it. He turned Frog's head up the Paja Road and was off through the post at Frog's best distance gait, a long, easy trot.

" Gosh, the lieutenant was in a hurry," said Baker as he watched the disappearing figure. " Must be trying to catch a train, or something."

" He sure was," agreed Winsoton. " I don't know what he's after, but I'll bet you a chicken dinner that whatever he's trying to catch, he does it."

" Huh, you want a sure thing," grunted Baker as he sank again into his seat in the shade. " Of course he'll catch it. He's on Frog, isn't he?"

Scott rode steadily forward.

" Take it easy, pony," he said as Frog evinced a tendency to increase his gait. " We've got a long, hard trail before us. You'll get all the riding you want today."

Two miles up the Paja Road he turned off to the left onto a trail leading through the jungle.

" I hope I'm right," he said to himself. " The only place he could be heading for, if my hunch is right, is Port of Chorerra, and this trail will take me there. It's longer than the road, and it isn't as good going, but I've got to ride around him and get ahead, or the deal's off. Can you make it, Frog? You've got to cover twenty-eight miles along a bad trail while Ginger makes twenty-four along a good one, and Ginger is no draught-horse, you know. Also, he's got a half-hour start."

Frog, once the road was left behind, settled down into a steady gait which covered the ground much faster than it appeared to. Scott knew better than to urge him forward. Frog, with that telepathy which linked him with Scott, knew that his master was in a hurry, and he forged steadily forward at a rate which surprised even his rider.

The trail was a miserable one. The mud was fetlock-deep much of the way, and at times Frog floundered along, almost up to his knees in the tenacious stuff. At times the trailing lianas were festooned across the road to such an extent that Scott was forced to lie almost flat on the saddle to avoid being swept off.

For three hours Frog forged steadily ahead, his nostrils dilated and his breath coming in quick heaves in the damp tropical air, yet he showed no signs of faltering.

" We'll make it, old fellow," Scott said as he wiped his streaming brow. " Another two miles and we'll hit the main trail, and I'll bet a month's pay that we're ahead."

The trail he was following came to an end and opened into the main trail less than a mile from Port of Chorerra. Scott looked back up the main trail as far as he could see, but there was no sign of a rider, and the trail did not reveal fresh tracks of a shod horse.

" We've won! " he cried exultantly. " That is, if we aren't off on a wild goose chase. One more mile, Frog, and then you can rest."

The lathered horse responded gamely to the spur and covered the mile to the hamlet at a hand gallop. Just before he reached the first hut of the village, Scott turned off into the jungle for a hundred yards. He dismounted and dropped Frog's reins to the ground.

"Now stay here, Frog," he said, "and don't sound off if you hear Ginger. Your job is done. Mine starts now."

He made his way on foot to the town, and in a few minutes was closeted with the local member of the Panamanian National Police. Five minutes later, he and the policeman walked down to the harbor and engaged in conversation with the owner of the only motor fishing boat in the harbor.

"You *sabe,* Concepcion?" Scott asked at length. "You know just what you do when he come?"

"Me *sabe,*" replied the fisherman with a grin.

Scott and the policeman retired into the cabin of the boat, and Scott drew his pistol and made sure it was loaded, then settled himself to wait.

His vigil was not a long one. Less than thirty minutes after he had entered the cabin, he heard the ring of leather-shod feet on the deck, then Ryan's voice speaking in voluble Spanish. Scott's knowledge of Spanish was not extensive, but he was able, with the aid of the policeman's quick interpreting, to gather the gist of the conversation. Ryan was trying to hire the boat for a trip to Buenaventura.

Concepcion played his part well, and for ten minutes the two men haggled over the price. At last an agreement was reached, and Scott could hear the crisp crackle of bills as money changed hands.

" All right, you go below," Concepcion said. " Then, soldiers come, they no find you."

Ryan's footsteps approached the cabin. Scott crouched to one side of the door. Presently it swung open and Ryan, covered with mud and sweat, entered. Scott straightened up and thrust the muzzle of his pistol full into the secret agent's face.

" The game's up, Ryan," he said.

Ryan stared for a moment, then a tired grin passed over his face.

" I guess it is, sir," he said.

Under Scott's instructions, the Panamanian policeman quickly searched the prisoner and removed a small, flat, automatic pistol he wore in a shoulder holster under his shirt.

" Now, Ryan, will you go along peacefully, or will I have to tie you? " Scott asked.

" I know when I'm licked, Lieutenant. I'll come along."

" All right. Walk ahead of me to where you left your horse. Don't try any funny work, or I'll shoot."

Ryan walked quietly along in front of Scott until he was half-way through the village. Presently he thrust his hand into his pocket as though seeking a cigarette. His hand came out, apparently empty, and he raised it casually to his mouth. In an instant Scott had dropped his pistol and was grappling with him.

Ryan fought hard, but his muscles were no match for Scott's, trained by long hours on the polo-field. Gradually the lieutenant twisted Ryan's wrist until his hand went limp and came open. A small white capsule dropped to the ground. Scott released him and picked up the capsule.

"None of that," he said sharply. "I'm going to bring you back alive."

Ryan's face was pale as he rubbed his aching wrist.

"Why do you want to make a fool of yourself, anyway?" Scott went on. "Of course, desertion is a serious matter. You'll probably get three years in the Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, but that's not worth committing suicide about."

"Desertion?" Ryan asked blankly.

"Of course," Scott answered. "You deserted the military service of the United States, didn't you? Well, we're going to try you for that."

"Is . . . is that all?" stammered the prisoner.

"That's all. That is, unless you try to beat the desertion charge and force us to bring up . . . other matters."

"I'll plead guilty, sir," Ryan decided promptly. "Will the lieutenant answer me just two questions?"

"Maybe. What are they?"

"How did the lieutenant find out who I was, and how did he get to Port of Chorerra ahead of me?"

"The answer to both questions is the same," laughed Scott. "You'll find the answer standing in the jungle waiting for me, a hundred yards from the trail, just outside of town."

V

TO THE RESCUE!

THE *siesta* hour had passed and an occasional figure had emerged from the darkened buildings onto the streets of Empire. There was a clatter of hoofs and down the road, which went curving from post headquarters on past Officer's Line to the corral, came an officer astride a beautifully shaped dark bay gelding with black points. The pair made a picture that would have delighted the heart of any lover of horses and horsemen, and Evelyn Bennitt, glancing out through the curtains of the commanding officer's quarters, felt her heart skip a beat as she recognized them.

Frog's satiny skin gleamed in the sunlight and his long, wavy tail and mane glistened like polished jet. He arched his neck proudly as he stepped along sedately enough, yet with a vast reserve of power and vitality expressed in every stride. His rider, clothed in the blue and gold silks of the Nineteenth's polo team, sat easily in his saddle with an air of careless grace, a polo mallet resting lightly on his shoulder. Swaying easily to the horse's motion, he seemed hardly aware of the reins in his fingers, yet there was an air of ready alertness about him that showed that no sudden emergency would catch him napping.

Midway of Officer's Line, a hail in a girl's voice made him rein in his mount. From Captain Rembrandt's quarters a twelve-year-old girl came running.

"Lieutenant Scott," she asked eagerly, "when are you going to give me my first jumping lesson?"

From Frog's back, Scott smiled indulgently down at the eager face of the post quartermaster's daughter.

"Just as soon as I can get a chance, Elsie," he assured her. "Right now we're having polo practise every afternoon and we will until after the big game on the twenty-fifth, but as soon as that's over, we'll go out and jump over everything in sight."

The girl's lower lip quivered slightly, but she strove to hide her acute disappointment.

" All right, thanks," she said, " but I hoped you could spare an hour before then. You see," she went on with a sudden breathless rush of words, " Daddy and everybody says it's been such a hard dry season that the rains are likely to be early, and once they start, we can't use the jumping ground. I've tried so hard to get someone to teach me. Lieutenant Glover used to offer to, but Daddy would never let me go out with him, and then when he said it was all right for you to do it, you are too busy with polo to have time."

Scott's face was suddenly contrite. He had promised two months before that he would give Elsie some lessons in jumping, but in the rush of duties he had never got around to it. The pony she usually rode was not adapted to jumping, but he knew that she had a firm enough seat, despite her age, to handle one of the smaller chargers. He glanced at his wrist watch and a sudden resolution formed itself in his mind.

" How soon can you get ready ? " he asked.

Elsie's face lightened instantly.

" I'm ready right now," she said.

" So you are," agreed Scott. " Boots, spurs and everything. All right, climb up in front of me and we'll go down to the corral and get you a horse. I'll let you ride Courtesy. He's a good little jumper up to three feet and that's as high as you'll want to go at first. Give me your hand."

" But I don't want to interfere with your polo practise," she demurred.

" That's all right," Scott assured her. " I was just going down to practise a few backhand shots on Frog and he doesn't need it. The regular practise doesn't start for an hour and that's plenty of time for your first lesson."

He grasped the girl's extended hand and swung her up in front of him. Frog gave a start at the unusual burden on his withers, but a quiet word from Scott steadied him and he moved sedately down the road toward the corral. Sergeant Baker emerged from the corral office at Scott's call, closely followed by Winsoton.

" Put Elsie's saddle on Courtesy, will you, Baker? " Scott said. " I'm going to take her out on the course and give her some lessons in going over the hurdles. The low brush hurdles are in good shape, aren't they? "

“ Yes, sir, the fatigue gang went over them yesterday, but I’m afraid I can’t give you Courtesy.”

“ Why not? ”

“ He got into a fight at the picket line this morning and got kicked. His off fore leg is swelled up some and I wouldn’t like to see him go out today. I can give you Cordwood ——”

“ No good. He buckjumps. Besides, I’m going to use him in the practise this afternoon.”

“ — or Chocolate ——”

“ Too hardmouthed. I’m going to use him today too.”

“ — or Pedro ——”

“ Pedro will do. He’s an easy jumper and as gentle as a kitten.”

“ Except when he gets scared, sir. I’d hate to see Miss Elsie go out on him, if the lieutenant will pardon the suggestion. He’s right tender-mouthed as a rule, but he gets obstinate streaks. He’s never got over the treatment Lieutenant Glover gave him.”

“ Oh, he’s all right. The worst he can do is bolt and Elsie can stay on him till he gets tired.”

“ When he bolts he shuts both his eyes tight, sir, and he’d run right into a stone wall and butt his brains out if one was in front of him. Even I can’t turn him when he gets started and the lieutenant knows that wouldn’t be safe for Miss Elsie.”

" Have you ridden him lately? "

" Not for two months, sir."

" Well, I've had him out on the polo-field a dozen times in the last three weeks and I've got him all over that foolishness. He was a little wild at first, but lately he's been as gentle and obedient as one could wish for. Put Elsie's saddle on him."

" Very well, sir."

The sergeant led out a fifteen hands strawberry roan with a white star and stockings and tied him to the hitching rack. Scott approached and laid a gentle hand on his neck. Pedro started at the touch, but quieted instantly at the lieutenant's soothing voice.

" Don't put a curb on him, Sergeant," Scott said. " It's apt to worry him with a greenhorn jumping. Just give him a Pelham bit."

" Yes, sir."

In a few minutes the horse was saddled and Scott helped Elsie onto his back. She settled herself in the saddle, gathered her reins and steadied Pedro like a veteran.

" Good girl," said Scott approvingly as he touched Frog with his spur. Just as they rode out of the corral, Sergeant Baker's voice stopped them.

" Oh, Lieutenant, you aren't going off the course, are you? "

" I don't think so. Why? "

" The Paraiso Road isn't safe, sir."

" Why not? "

" A big crack has opened at the head of Cucaracha Slide, about three-quarters of a mile beyond Culebra The department engineer was down yesterday to look over that bridge they're rebuilding on the target range trail and he said to keep all traffic off the road."

" A crack in the dry season, eh? " exclaimed Scott. " That's rather unusual. I wonder what made it open up. Sergeant Winsoton hasn't been walking along it, has he? " he went on with a sly glance at the chief cargador who had been an interested, although silent spectator.

Sergeant Baker guffawed uproariously and Winsoton's face grew red.

" That isn't fair, Lieutenant," he protested. " I've been taking those exercises you recommended and I'm losing weight fast. Honest, I am."

" Losing weight, nothing! " retorted Baker. " He's taking the exercises all right, Lieutenant, but he's won so many chicken dinners off me lately that he's putting weight on faster than he can exercise it off."

Scott laughed heartily and touched Frog again with his spur. With Elsie trotting beside him, he rode out to the jumping course which lay out along the road toward Culebra. Cautioning Elsie to hold Pedro steady, he rode toward the nearest hurdle. Frog went at the obstruction in an easy canter, rose over it with scarcely an effort. At a touch from Scott's spur he rose on his hind legs, whirled about, and leaped back over the hurdle.

"Now take it easy, Elsie," cautioned Scott as he rejoined her. "Don't rush your jump and lean well forward when he rises. Don't worry about Pedro, he'll clear it easily."

Her face pale, but with determination showing in every line of her slim body, Elsie gave Pedro his head. The roan went at the hurdle with an easy loping gait, rose readily over it. Elsie applied her spur and he checked, whirled and jumped back over it. Scott clapped his hands enthusiastically.

"That's fine!" he cried. "You went over like a veteran, but you were a little too straight in your saddle. Lean forward more as he rises. Now watch me again."

For an hour the lesson progressed. Frog was slightly bored at the continual jumping over the low hurdles, but he took them dutifully.

"I think that's enough for today, Elsie," said Scott at length, "and besides, it's time for me to be on the polo-field. Now sit quietly while I take Frog over the high hurdles a time or two and then we'll go in."

He rode Frog to the upper end of the course and sent him at the four and five foot hurdles. Frog rose over them like a bird and Scott's face flushed with pleasure as the course flew by under him. He reached the end of the run and was turning back when a shrill scream smote his ears. He checked Frog in his stride and whirled him about. His face paled at the sight which met his gaze.

Elsie had sat quietly on Pedro, admiring the ease and grace with which Scott and Frog had taken the course. Suddenly Pedro threw up his head and snorted.

"Steady, Pedro," she admonished him as she tightened the reins.

The horse danced about excitedly, his gaze fixed on the ground a few feet in front of him. Elsie leaned forward, her eyes on the ground, trying to see the cause of the horse's fright. The grass wavered in a thin line and she sat upright with a start. From the waving grass, an ugly snout protruded, and a long sinuous tail showed itself. Elsie gave a cry of alarm, then laughed as she realized that it was a harmless iguana, the giant lizard of the tropics.

Her cry was the match needed to set off the dynamite which was the frightened Pedro. He snorted whirled about on his hind legs, and tore off at full speed. As the ground flew by under his thundering hoofs, blind terror gripped him. He threw back his head and closed his eyes. Entirely oblivious of where his terrific speed was taking him, he raced across the ground. It was sheer luck that his course did not lead him into a hurdle against which he would have crashed and gone down, and it was more luck that he headed toward the paved road which led past Culebra and Paraiso to the locks at Pedro Miguel instead of into the jungle where his rider would have been torn from his back in a few rods by the twining lianas, if the horse had not come to sudden grief against a tree trunk.

Elsie's face blanched as the horse started. She gave one shrill scream to Scott for aid, then braced herself in her stirrups and sawed with all of her strength on the reins. She drew the horse's head back a little, but this only had the effect of increasing his blind, unreasoning fright. She relaxed the reins and devoted her attention to keeping her seat and trying to guide the horse into the open road.

Scott's first thought was to send Frog after the runaway at his best speed, but even as he touched him with his spur, the futility of such a course struck him. Frog was the fastest horse in Empire, but Pedro was not a great deal slower. Long before Frog could make up the three hundred yard start which the runaway had, the damage would have been done. Scott groaned as he thought of the right-angled turn in the road three-quarters of a mile beyond Culebra, and the broken road beyond the bend.

" Even if she manages to guide him safely around the turn, the road's liable to cave in with her," he cried. " Come on, Frog, our only chance is to take the back trail. We can head her off before she gets to the turn—if we're lucky."

He turned Frog and dashed toward the jungle at the best speed of which the wiry bay was capable. A path opened through the jungle before them. Down the trail they raced, Scott bending low over his mount's neck to avoid the branches and creepers which tore at him.

The trail wound and twisted, but Frog could " turn around on a dime and hand you back a nickel change " as Scott often boasted. At almost as good speed as he would have made along an open road, he raced along the trail which intersected the Paraiso Road a thousand yards beyond Culebra.

For a mile the trail led through the jungle, then opened up into a patch of savanna, at the far end of which was a bridge. Frog raced toward it. He approached it at full speed, but as he came to it, he braced himself and slid to a stop. Scott cried out in dismay as he looked at it.

The bridge had been gradually getting into worse repair for some time, and recently the department engineer had been prevailed upon to inspect it. He had promptly condemned it and ordered it rebuilt. The old bridge had been torn down, and a new one was in the process of construction. The girders and cross-beams had been bolted into place, but the flooring had not been completed. Most of the flooring planks had been laid in place, but none of them had been spiked down, and there were gaps six inches wide between the boards. Frog looked at the bridge for a moment, then without signal from Scott he whirled about.

Scott studied the creek below them. The banks were fifteen feet high and almost perpendicular. It was probably impossible for a horse to go down them without a spill at the bottom, and it was manifestly impossible for one to climb the opposite bank. Directly across the bridge was the Paraiso Road, and two hundred yards away, Pedro, with Elsie still on his back, was coming at full speed, his head drawn far back and his eyes tightly closed.

Scott rapidly calculated the chances. The bend in the road was less than a quarter of a mile beyond the bridge, and Pedro would be past long before he could dismount and run across on foot.

" Come on, Frog," he cried as he turned his horse's head toward the unfinished structure. " You've got to do it! "

Frog hesitated at the edge of the bridge, tried to turn back. Scott held his head to the front with an iron hand and drove home his spurs. Frog snorted, reared, and strove to turn around. With a sudden inspiration, Scott loosed his reins and raised his spurs. He leaned forward and stroked Frog's neck.

" Come on, Frog," he said, quietly and confidently. " You can make it and you've got to. If you don't, Elsie will be smashed up. Come on, boy, HUP! "

Frog snorted and sidled along the bridge front for an instant. Scott's hand was still on his neck and the quiet, authoritative voice which Frog loved, and which had never sent him into harm, urged him on. The horse stepped tentatively forward, rested a forefoot on a plank. He followed the first foot with another. Step by step, as daintily as though he were treading on eggs, he started across the shaky structure.

Midway of the bridge, a plank turned under Frog's foot. Scott's heart rose into his mouth.

" Steady, boy," he said quietly. " It's all right, pony. Just keep moving. Steady."

Frog gave a start when the plank turned, but he steadied at the sound of his master's voice and renewed his careful progress across the bridge. Scott raised his head and his lips moved in silent prayer as he measured the distance between where he was and the point where he hoped to intercept the flying Pedro. Elsie saw him and waved to him.

" Come on, Frog," he implored. " Keep moving, pony. Please, horse, if you love me, keep moving."

Slowly and carefully, but steadily, Frog made his way forward. On the road Pedro was eating up the distance with terrifying rapidity. Another plank turned under Frog's foot, but Scott's earnestness had communicated itself to the horse by that strange telepathy which links a thorough horseman with his chosen mount. He did not hesitate, but went on across the bridge at a more rapid rate. Just as his hoofs touched solid ground, Pedro swept by with a thunder of hoofs.

Frog had passed the bridge and the hard road was under his feet. Leaning forward on his neck and riding the stirrups to ease him, Scott urged Frog to his utmost speed. The horse responded nobly and flew on down the road after the runaway.

Inch by inch he closed the gap which separated them. Scott swung to the side of his saddle and reached out his arm as the two horses came neck and neck.

" Jump, Elsie! " he shouted.

She nodded and dropped her reins. With both hands on the flat pommel of her saddle, she braced herself for the effort. The two horses were racing side by side. Scott dropped his reins and held out both arms. She leaned toward him. At a touch of Scott's spur, Frog closed in until the two horses were almost touching. Elsie made an effort, sprang toward Scott.

The lieutenant's strong arms caught her and lifted her into his saddle. Like a bag of meal he threw her across Frog's withers and then reached for Pedro's reins. He caught them, dragged Pedro's head toward him. At a word, Frog slackened his pace. The lessened tempo of hoofs awakened a strain of memory in the frightened Pedro and he slackened his pace to correspond.

" *Trot!* " cried Scott in his best parade ground voice.

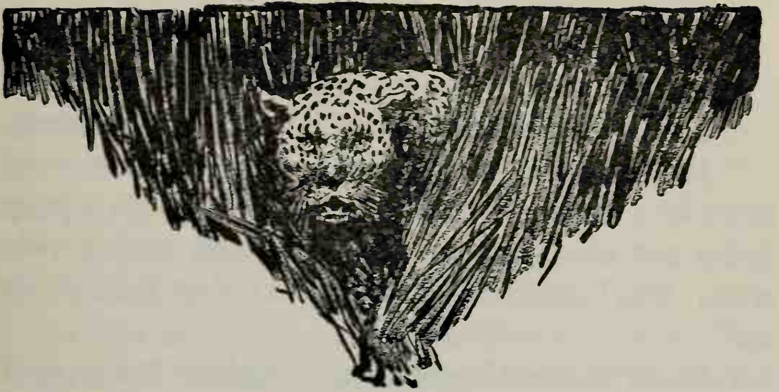
Frog drew down to a trot, and Pedro did likewise. He opened his eyes, the fright gone in the company in which he found himself. The two horses came to a halt with the turn in the road less than twenty yards away.

" All right, Elsie," cried Scott cheerfully as the horses stopped. " Everything's all right now. You may ride Frog home, if you wish. Hello, what's the matter, little lady? "

There was no answer from the inert figure before him. Elsie had kept her head on the racing runaway, but when she had relaxed in Scott's strong arms, overwrought nature had asserted herself. The danger over, Elsie Rembrandt had fainted.

" Whoa! " cried Scott suddenly. Frog had shivered and started at the rustle of a leaf across the road. He stood still, shivering in every muscle, rolling his eyes back at his master, and giving every evidence of being in the throes of an overwhelming fear.

" Whoa, boy," said Scott softly as he stroked the pony's sweaty neck. " You're as bad as she is, go to pieces after all the danger is over. I guess I'll have to take you both in and put you on sick report."



VI

TWO LITTLE CATS

There was a sudden commotion at the picket line in the headquarters corral. Frog raised his head and looked earnestly up the road toward headquarters, his ears perked forward; then whickered joyously. Baker and Winsoton rose from the chairs in the shade of the corral office, where they had been in earnest consultation for the past hour, and saluted. Lieutenant Scott, polo mallet in hand, was entering the corral. As he returned their salute, Baker stepped forward.

" Sir, may I speak to the lieutenant for a minute? " he asked.

" Surely, Sergeant. Sound off."

" It's about Frog, sir."

Scott glanced quickly toward the picket line.

" Is his leg giving trouble? " he asked anxiously.

" No, sir, his leg's all right. The swelling went down in a couple of hours. Frog's too tough a pony to be put on sick report from a hack with a polo stick. The lieutenant can ride him today, if he wants to."

" No, I'll use Chocolate and Spider today as I planned. What did you want to tell me about Frog? "

Baker's eye sought Winsoton's for a moment, then rested on the distant hills. When he faced Scott again, his face wore that strangely impersonal gaze which is the distinguishing mark of an old soldier.

" Sir, Major Craven was down here today to see me about Frog. He asked me whether the lieutenant had broken him so that anyone could ride him."

" What did you say? "

" Well, sir, I showed him Frog's descriptive card with ' outlaw ' and ' vicious ' plastered all over it, and told him that I didn't think that anyone but

Lieutenant Scott could ride him and get away with it."

" That isn't fair to Frog, Baker. You know that he's thoroughly gentle now. Why, little Elsie Rembrandt rode him up and down Officer's Line for fifteen minutes yesterday before practise."

" Yes, sir, Major Craven saw her do it. I tried my best to give Frog a bad name, but he didn't act like he believed me much. He wants Frog for his charger."

" Why, he can't have him. Frog is assigned to my polo string."

" I told him that, sir, but he didn't act much impressed. He doesn't play polo, you know. We've got to figure out some way to keep Frog for the lieutenant, for if he loses him, we might as well hand the Zone championship to the Artillery team on the twenty-fifth without playing them."

" I wouldn't say that, Sergeant, but it would hurt. I planned to use him in the first chukker and then hold him in reserve in case one of my other ponies got hurt."

Winsoton cut in eagerly.

" If the lieutenant will just leave the matter to me and Baker, sir," he said, his plump face beaming with earnestness, " I think we have a plan that'll fix it up. I bet him two chicken dinners at the American House . . ."

Baker whirled on the chief cargador savagely.

" You shut up, Tubby," he said sharply. " That bet is between you and me and the lieutenant doesn't cut in on it. What he doesn't know doesn't hurt him. Savvy? "

Winsoton subsided into an abashed silence, and Baker turned back to Scott.

" The only trouble with that guy is that he uses his mouth too much, sir," he said. " Both to eat with and to talk with. I wish that the lieutenant would talk with Captain Kildare about Frog. I told him all about it. He's on the polo-field now, sir."

" Thank you, Sergeant, I will. Don't be too hard on Winsoton; he's taking his exercise regularly."

Scott vaulted onto the back of Chocolate who stood, ready saddled, at the hitching rack by the corral office and cantered off toward the polo-field. As he approached, Captain Kildare left a scrimmage and rode toward him.

" Did Sergeant Baker see you, Scott? " he asked.

" Yes, he did, but I didn't take him very seriously. I wouldn't put it past Craven, but Colonel Bennitt isn't going to let him grab the best polo mount in the regiment two weeks before a championship game."

" If that's what you're banking on, I have bad news for you. Colonel Bennitt got a cable this morning ordering him to the States for two months. He sails on the *Chateau Thierry* tomorrow. That leaves Major Craven in command."

Scott whistled softly, dismay written large on his face.

"That puts a different complexion on things," he said. "Maybe I'll lose him after all."

"You will unless we can do something to stop it. Major Craven doesn't play polo and he isn't interested in whether we win or not. If he wants Frog, he'll take him. Now here is the situation. Baker showed him Frog's record, and I talked to him myself. Between us, we have him pretty well out of the notion. He isn't the best rider in the army, and he knows it. If he feels sure that Frog is mean, really downright vicious, he'll let him alone. It all depends on whether we can keep him bluffed. There must be no more of the post children riding him, at least until after the twenty-fifth. Do you understand?"

"Surely, Captain."

"Another thing. Frog used to be mean. Can't you get him to buck some day when the major is around? Wallop him with a polo stick, or something like that."

"I might, Captain, but I won't. In the first place, I wouldn't treat Frog like that, and in the second place, it wouldn't be playing the game. I'm not going to resort to any trickery, even if losing him costs us the championship."

Captain Kildare flushed.

"You're right, Scotty, a thing like that just isn't done. Well, at any rate, don't parade his gentleness. Come on, let's get into this scrimmage."

"Right."

A white-painted sphere bounded out from the milling crush of men and horses in the center of the field. Scott rode toward it and swung his mallet in a long arc. There was a sharp crack as his maple mallet head met willow root, and the ball whirred through the air. Chocolate turned and charged after it.

"Good work, pony," muttered Scott as he leaned over the flying horse's neck for another shot. "You're good, for all you haven't got Frog's speed or stamina."

An hour later he rode his second mount, Spider, at a walk past Officer's Line to cool him off before turning him in at the corral. As he passed Colonel Bennitt's quarters, a feminine voice hailed him.

"Oh, Scotty!"

He reined in his mount, vaulted to the ground and saluted the nineteen-year-old daughter of the regimental commander.

"Hello, Evelyn," he said, "where have you been keeping yourself hidden for the last two weeks? I haven't seen you once."

"It's your own fault," replied the girl. "I've been sitting at home every afternoon hoping that a nice lieutenant would come by and ask me to go riding with him like he used to."

"Oh, now, Evelyn, that isn't fair," protested Scott, his face reddening under the heavy tan which five months in the tropics had put on it. "You know that I have to practise every afternoon. The Artillery game is only two weeks off and I've got to polish up my mounts."

"That's right, think up some lame excuse. You men are all alike. As old Mammy Caroline used to tell me, 'Honey, dar ain't no trustin' none of 'em.' "

"I'd like to go riding with you, Evelyn, but I simply can't spare an afternoon. All the same, I will spare one. Will you be free tomorrow?"

"No, I'm going to Colon to see Daddy off, but if you can spare the afternoon, there is something you can do for me."

"Whatever you say, fair maiden. Hast a dragon for me to slay?"

"Something of the sort, Sir Knight. Scotty, I'm envious."

"Of whom, pray?"

" Of Mary Brian, at Miraflores. She has a pet leopard kitten."

" Good grief, what next? I've already captured you a sloth, an ant-eater, an iguana, two parrots, an alligator and a fawn, not to mention the monkeys. Have I got to go out into the jungles and single-handed ravish a leopard cub from its indignant mamma? "

" Two of them. I want a pair. They'll be so cute playing together. Go out and get them tomorrow afternoon, will you, Scotty? If you'll have them here when I get back from Colon, I'll forgive you for the horrid way you've neglected me."

" Girl, you don't want much. Why not a couple of tapir and a boa constrictor? A nice little *fer-de-lance* might be a good pet if its fangs were drawn."

" I don't like snakes, Scotty. I want two leopard kittens. You'll get them for me tomorrow, won't you? "

" I'll try, Evelyn, but I can't promise. A man might hunt the Panamanian jungles for a month and never find a litter."

" I know just where there is one. Fentress, Daddy's orderly, found it, but he's afraid to get me the kittens. He thinks the mother might be at home."

Scott groaned.

"Well, where is this feline nursery?"

"On the Paja Road, about three miles out of the post. You know where the Chorerra trail cuts off?"

"Yes."

"It's about half a mile beyond that on the south side of the road. Fentress saw the mother cat crossing the road three times right there. You ought to find her tracks in the dust easily enough, if you really want to."

"And I am supposed to invade the privacy of her domicile and kidnap her children, am I? What a sweet detail! I don't blame Fentress, I think he showed good sense."

"Of course, if you don't want to oblige me, I can ask Lieutenant Lacey."

"Lady, get a pen ready for those kittens. They'll be in the post by this time tomorrow."

"Thanks, Scotty, I knew that I could depend on you. I'll telephone Sergeant Baker to get a pen ready right away. Be sure you get two of them. Mary will be green with envy."

The next afternoon, Lieutenant Scott rode slowly along the Paja Road, bent far over the saddle studying the ground beneath Frog's hoofs. He had gone a mile beyond the head of the Chorerra trail and back, but no signs of cat tracks had rewarded his search. He came again to the trail head and checked Frog, studying the jungle.

"I've no doubt that Fentress saw that cat," he muttered, "but I can't find a trace of it. I'll go up that road again, but I'm pretty sure that I covered the ground thoroughly."

For fifteen minutes Frog moved forward at a slow walk, his rider leaning forward eyeing the ground carefully. Suddenly the horse gave a snort and stopped, every muscle quivering.

"Steady, old fellow," said Scott as he straightened up. Frog's nostrils dilated and he eyed the jungle suspiciously.

"What is it, boy?" asked Scott as he scanned the impenetrable leafy barrier which hemmed in the road. Frog snorted, half in fear, and half in anger and disgust, as he pawed the road. He suddenly threw up his head and backed a few paces. As Scott steadied him with voice and reins, he saw the cause of the horse's fear. From the jungle emerged a leopard cat, who stalked slowly across the road, barely turning her head toward the horse and rider with a supercilious air of disdain. It was evident from her appearance that she had kittens.

As she disappeared into the jungle on the north side of the road, Scott leaped from Frog's back. He unbottoned his pistol holster and made sure that his weapon was loose in its sheath. He caught Frog's reins and drew them forward over the horse's head, allowing the ends to trail on the ground.

" Now listen here, Frog," he said solemnly, " you stay here until I get back, understand? *No marcharse, savvy?* I may need you in a big hurry."

He stroked the horse's nose affectionately for a moment, then left him and hastened along the road to the spot where he had seen the cat. Her tracks were plain on the road and he turned into the jungle on the south. In a few feet he found himself on a well defined trail.

" There's one nice thing about this kidnapping party," he reflected as he moved cautiously through the jungle, his gun ready. " Mamma is out at a tea fight or something of the sort, and Papa isn't likely to be hanging around this time of day. If I'm lucky, I'll get my victims and be on my way home before anyone realizes what I'm up to."

The trail twisted and turned for a few hundred feet and came to an end before a hollow in an earthen bank, half protected by a boulder. Scott thrust his flashlight into the opening. A series of angry hisses greeted him. A few feet away he could see six green sparks glowing in the beam of light.

" The children are home, all right," he said lightly. He looked around and back up the trail, but there was nothing in sight except a small grey marmoset who scolded at him from a near-by lignum vitæ tree. With a shrug of his shoulders, Scott went down on all-fours and thrust his head and shoulders into the hole.

An exploring hand was gripped by tiny needle-pointed teeth, and he jerked it back with an exclamation. He turned on his light and with it in one hand, he resumed his efforts. The three kittens were backed against the rear wall of the cave, spitting and hissing at him. The light enabled him to guide his hand, and in a moment he had a kitten by the scruff of its neck and was dragging it out into the daylight. It was about the size of a three-quarters grown house-cat, but Scott whistled as he saw its pads. The kitten had claws nearly an inch long, sharp as razors, and curved viciously. He dropped the kitten on the grass and returned to the attack, flashlight in hand. In a few moments a second kitten had joined the first one on the grass.

Scott thrust his flashlight into his pocket and inspected his two captives. They were not as yet quite steady on their feet, but their wild nature was evident, for they both attacked the lieutenant's leather covered legs with gusto. Scott watched them in amusement for a few moments, and then picked one up by the scruff of the neck in either hand and started back toward the road.

It was not an easy task to hold the heavy kittens at arm's length in the thick jungle, and several times he got them close enough for their claws to strike home through the thin cotton breeches which he wore. At length the road opened before him and he turned toward his patiently waiting horse. Frog snorted and started to rear as the odor of the kittens assailed his nostrils.

"Steady, Frog!" cried Scott firmly.

The horse stopped his plunging and stood, trembling in every muscle and with sweat dripping from his flanks, as Scott came up with the squirming, yowling burden he bore. He stood by the side of his mount, trying to figure out a method of climbing into the saddle without either relinquishing his grip on the captives, or throwing them against the horse. While he stood there, Frog snorted again, and Scott looked back up the road. The leopard cat had leaped out onto the road and was glaring at him. Both kittens squalled with renewed vigor, and the cat bounded into the jungle toward her cave.

"There'll be a hot time around here in a minute!" cried Scott.

Desperately he tore open his shirt and stuffed one of the squalling kittens inside it. With his free hand he caught Frog's withers and vaulted into the saddle. Hardly had he done so than the leopard cat emerged from the jungle and started down the road toward him with long, lithe leaps.

There was no use to try to recover his reins. Scott struck both spurs home and shouted encouragingly to Frog. The horse leaped forward like an uncoiling spring, the reins flying loose before him. Scott, with a grimace of pain, reached inside his shirt and dragged out the kitten he had thrust there.

Frog's head was suddenly jerked down and he stumbled. Scott realized that the horse had stepped on the loose reins, but luckily the leather had given. Freed from all control, the horse sped down the road like an arrow. Scott, both stirrups lost, was holding his seat by a miracle of balancing, a squalling leopard kitten held at arm's length in each hand.

Down the road came the mother cat at her best speed, but fear lent wings to Frog's speedy heels. The cat was left behind, and as they approached the post, she gave up the chase.

Scott tried to stop Frog, but his voice had little effect. Down the road past headquarters, past Officer's Line, and toward the corral, went the drum of flying hoofs. The corral opened before them and Frog dashed in and headed for the picket line. Scott slung one of the kittens over the arm which held the other and laid a restraining hand on Frog's neck.

"Steady, boy!" his voice rang out. Frog slowed down as the much-loved voice sounded in his ears and the gentle, familiar touch he loved fell on his neck. In another moment, Scott laid his hand on the pommel of the saddle and vaulted lightly to the ground. True to his training, Frog stopped dead and turned to face his master.

"Take these spitfires," Scott cried to Sergeant Baker. "They belong to Miss Bennitt. I've got to go up to the hospital and have these scratches cleaned out before they get infected. Detail a man to walk Frog until he's dry, and have the saddler put new reins on my bridle."

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant as he turned away, the kittens held gingerly at arm's length.

"Mr. Scott!" came a sharp voice. The lieutenant whirled about and saluted. Major Craven answered the salute and stepped forward.

"I have decided to have Frog assigned to me," he said shortly. "There seems to have been a plot around here to make me think he is a vicious and unmanageable horse, but after seeing you ride him without reins or stirrups, and with a wild animal in each hand, I know better. He will be assigned to me tomorrow."

" But . . . he's one of my polo string, sir," protested Scott.

" That has no bearing on the matter. I have issued an order this morning cutting the polo string from thirty-two horses to twenty-four, and he will be one of those relieved from the polo assignment. Sergeant Baker, have Frog saddled and bridled with a double bit and sent to my quarters at three tomorrow afternoon."

" Frog is only used to a snaffle, sir," said Scott.

" Mr. Scott, may I remind you that Frog is my horse now and not yours? He'll get used to the bit I choose to ride him with."

With a burning face, Scott made his way to the hospital. Sergeant Baker cast a black look after the retreating figure of the commanding officer. As he did so, Sergeant Winsoton appeared around the corner of the corral office. At the sight of his friend, Baker's grim look faded and was replaced by a smile. The smile grew into a chuckle, and the chuckle broke out into a laugh.

" Say, Tubby," Baker called, " I guess you're going to get a chance to win those dinners from me after all. Get your stuff ready right away. Frog goes to Major Craven tomorrow afternoon."

" Okay, Pete, but if I win, remember that it's fried chicken, a double order on each dinner."

" Three orders if you win, Tubby. Go as far as you like."

With a silent laugh shaking his bulky frame, Sergeant Winsoton walked out of the corral toward the jungle, carefully scanning the ground as he went.

Evelyn Bennitt did not return to the post until the next afternoon, but when she did, she sent for Scott.

" Scotty, those kittens are just too darling for anything," she cried. " I'm so sorry you got all scratched up getting them for me."

" Those scratches are nothing to what I would have got if Frog had been a little less trained, or a little slower on his feet," said Scott with a wry grin. " The mother cat didn't seem to appreciate my relieving her of two-thirds of the cares of maternity. The scratches will heal up all right. The thing that counts is losing my horse."

" Which horse? "

" Frog."

" Frog? Good heavens, what happened to him? "

In a few words Scott explained the situation. Evelyn Bennitt flew into a towering rage.

" That sneak! " she cried. " Just as soon as Daddy was out of the way, he had to pull off something like that. You just wait until Daddy gets home, I'll tell him an earful."

“ That won’t help us beat the Artillery,” said Scott mournfully. “ Frog was my main reliance.”

“ Isn’t there anything we can do, Scotty? I’ll go down to Quarry Heights and see General Kingdon if you want me to. I know him awfully well and he’s a wonderful sportsman. He won’t let Craven get away with that, even if he is temporarily in command here.”

“ You’ll do nothing of the sort, Evelyn. We’ll wash our dirty linen in private. We may not beat the Artillery, but we’ll let them know that they’ve been playing polo. Let’s walk down the line and tell Frog good-bye. The major ordered him brought to his quarters at three.”

They strolled down Officer’s Line. They were still fifty yards from Major Craven’s quarters when he emerged and walked to the hitching rack to get Frog. An orderly held the horse’s head while the major climbed into the saddle. Hardly had he done so than the orderly dropped the reins and sprang back. Frog gave a vicious snort, rose on his hind legs, whirled around, and then shot straight forward fifteen feet in one mighty bound. It was the old trick which had earned him his name. Major Craven pulled leather and held his seat for a moment, but as Frog landed he sunfished, and the major went over the horse’s crupper to the ground.

"Policed!" cried Evelyn in delight.

The major rose, shook the dust from his shoulders, and approached the horse. Frog snorted and edged away, but the major caught his bridle. He put one foot in a stirrup, and with a sudden bound, sprang into the saddle. Hardly had he landed before Frog was bucking down the road, head down and tail flying. Craven kept his seat for a few minutes until Frog sunfished again. This was more than he could stick and he flew off into a hibiscus hedge. He crawled out and again approached the horse. Frog reared and struck savagely at him. The major avoided the blow and caught the saddle. There was a short struggle and he was once more astride the horse. Frog rose straight up on his hind legs until he lost his balance and went over backwards. Major Craven leaped free in the nick of time. As Frog scrambled to his feet, the major caught the bridle and again threw himself into the saddle. Frog lowered his head and bucked like a broncho. He changed tactics and reared again, but not enough to go over. From the rear, he dropped his forefeet to the ground and promptly sunfished again. The major had slipped his feet from the stirrups when Frog reared and he was caught totally unprepared. He went sailing through the air to land on his shoulder and head. For a moment he lay where he fell in a curiously crumpled heap. Frog rushed his enemy with bared teeth, intent on trampling him.

“ FROG! ”

Scott’s shout pierced the air in the nick of time. Frog’s feet were already poised above the prostrate man, who was vainly trying to crawl out of danger. Frog swung sideways and paused, irresolute.

“ Steady, boy! ” came Scott’s voice.

The horse hesitated a moment, then moved slowly toward the lieutenant. Scott ignored him and hurried anxiously to the major, who was slowly and painfully rising.

“ Are you hurt, sir? ” he asked anxiously.

“ No, I think no bones are broken,” said the major as he gained his feet with Scott’s assistance, “ but that horse is going to get hurt just as soon as I can get a gun. He is downright vicious and should be shot. Why, the devil tried to kill me when I was down.”

“ I have no trouble with him, sir,” said Scott.

“ Then you must be a magician. For Heaven’s sake, take the brute and keep him. I never want to see him again.”

“ Very well, sir. Shall I have him reassigned to my polo string? ”

“ Assign him to what you please, just as long as I don’t see him again.”

"Yes, sir."

Scott looped Frog's reins over his arm and walked back toward the commanding officer's quarters with Evelyn.

"Isn't it funny that Frog acted up with Major Craven the first time he tried to ride him!" she asked. "And wasn't it lucky! Now you have your horse back, and it's 'Look out, Artillery!'"

"I don't understand it," said Scott. "Craven is a good rider, and besides, I would have sworn that anyone could have ridden him. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go down to polo practise and break the glad tidings to Captain Kildare. He'll be tickled pink to see Frog back on the squad."

With a parting salute to the girl, Scott vaulted lightly into Frog's saddle. Hardly had he landed than the horse snorted in wrath and sprang viciously forward. Scott was nearly unseated, but as the horse landed and started to buck, he was back in the saddle. Instead of using his crop or spurs, Scott slid his hand soothingly down the arched neck.

"Steady, boy!" he said, in a firm, but kindly tone.

The familiar touch stopped Frog in the middle of a buck. He stood quietly, trembling like a leaf.

"It's all right, old fellow," went on Scott, stroking his neck. "This is your old pal, Frog. Steady, boy, steady."

The horse ceased trembling. Scott touched him lightly with his spurs, and he started down the road at a trot. He went for a few feet, then his head went down for a buck. Again Scott spoke soothingly to him, and Frog's head came up again. With no further remonstrance, he trotted toward the corral.

"Sergeant Baker!" called Scott as he rode in. The stable sergeant appeared in the doorway of the corral office, his eyes bulging with astonishment and his jaw dropping. Behind him was the bulky frame of Sergeant Winsoton, a broad smile on his plump face.

"Get me a polo saddle and a snaffle bit," directed Scott. "Frog is reassigned to me. Major Craven didn't like him. He's pretty nervous just now. I don't think he likes all that iron he has in his mouth."

"I—I beg your pardon—sir," stammered Baker, "but did the lieutenant get right on Frog and ride him after the major did?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Will the lieutenant please dismount?"

Wondering at the request, Scott vaulted to the ground. Sergeant Winsoton walked out of the corral office, grinning from ear to ear. Sergeant Baker unfastened the cinch on Frog and threw the saddle to the ground. He removed the saddle blanket and unwrapped it. Between the folds of the blanket were a dozen black palm thorns, points down toward the horse.

" No wonder the lieutenant thought Frog was nervous," he said. " Tubby and I figured that we had to sour the major on Frog some way, so we fixed it up so that he'd have a nice ride, thinking he might turn the horse back, but I didn't expect that the lieutenant would get right on and ride him. I wouldn't have believed that any man in the world could have ridden that horse to the corral with those thorns in his back."

With wondering eyes, Scott threw his arms around Frog's neck and pulled the horse's head down.

" You nervy little pony," he said admiringly as he twisted Frog's ears. " Letting me ride you in that condition just because I told you it was all right. I believe that I could ride you through fire, water, and a barbed-wire entanglement without your turning a hair. Couldn't I, pony? "

Frog nuzzled his master's neck lovingly.

As Scott rode Frog, resaddled and bridled with the light polo equipment, out of the corral, Sergeant Winsoton capered clumsily in the sun.

" Oh, boy, chicken! " he chortled joyously. " Two chicken dinners, count 'em, one—two, and both with double orders. Look happy, you old owl, you're paying for them."

"You earned them, you clumsy hippopotamus," chuckled Baker. "That thorn idea of yours was a wonder. It did the trick all right. Say, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to take you to Panama the night of the twenty-fifth and fill you with chicken until you can't choke down another bite. And I'm not going to pay for it either. I'm going to copper those two dinners with bets on the game, and I'll let the Artillery do the buying. With Frog back, man, we can't lose!"

VII

A NEEDED LESSON

MAJOR CRAVEN frowned heavily at the two officers standing before his desk.

"I am not inclined to grant your request," he said. "As you know, I do not approve of polo. It serves no useful purpose, is a waste of time and energy for the players, and ruins the horses for other purposes."

"Colonel Bennitt favors polo very strongly, sir," suggested Captain Kildare, leader of the Nineteenth's polo squad.

" For that reason alone, I have not prohibited the game in this regiment, as I would were I in permanent command. Nevertheless, I do not intend to excuse officers from morning drill in order to play polo in the afternoon."

" I only asked to have the horses excused, sir," objected Kildare.

" Men or horses, the principle is the same. Probably the horses need the drill as much as the players. It is not my policy to allow polo, or any other amusement, to interfere with the regular training."

" We're under a big handicap as it is, sir," pleaded Kildare. " With the polo string cut from thirty-two to twenty-four horses, each member of the team has to play two full chukkers on the same horse twice during the game. The artillerymen will have fresh mounts for each period. If our horses have to drill all morning, they'll be too tired to stand up under the strain. After all, there's only one championship game a year, sir."

" That is an advantage," retorted the major dryly. " Well, I'll consider the matter and let you know my decision later."

Captain Kildare saluted and turned to go, but the second officer, who had stood silent and motionless during the interview, suddenly spoke.

"Will the major attend the game tomorrow afternoon?" he asked.

"I will not, Mr. Scott. I consider the game a waste of time."

A flush mounted into Scott's ruddy face at the major's words. He sincerely loved the royal game in which he boasted a four-goal handicap.

"That's hardly fair, sir," he said boldly. "You condemn polo, when you don't play and have never studied the game. If you did, you would find it one of the finest developers of men and horses there is. It teaches the players teamwork, and it gives the horses courage, initiative, and almost human intelligence."

"I suppose you allude to the surly, bucking brute you ride."

"Yes, sir. Frog is the finest polo pony I've ever straddled. He was an outlaw, condemned to be shot for viciousness, when I got him. Today he is thoroughly dependable. That is what polo does for a horse."

"I have seen no evidence of dependability in Frog," snapped the major as he rubbed his shoulder, still sore from his battle with Scott's mount two weeks before. "He is still an outlaw. I have no intention of attending the game."

He turned to the papers on his desk with an air of finality. Scott hesitated a moment, then went on.

" I wish you would, sir," he insisted. An inspiration flamed across his brain. He thought rapidly, weighed the chances before he spoke further. " Sir," he went on with a sudden air of resolution, " if you'll attend the game, I'll abide by your judgment. If, after the game, you still insist that Frog is an outlaw and not dependable, and that polo doesn't develop horses, I'll turn in my mounts and quit the game. The other members of the team will do the same."

Major Craven's eyes glittered.

" That's a fair proposition," he said. " Under those circumstances, I'll attend and watch. If you can show me that what you say is correct, I'll withdraw my opposition to the game. If you can't, polo is at an end in Empire."

" Thank you, sir. In view of this, will you excuse the horses from morning drill? "

" Both the horses and players. I'll give you an even chance."

The two officers saluted and withdrew.

" An even chance! " snorted Kildare when they were out of hearing. " The chance of a bone with a hungry dog! Scotty, have you gone crazy to make him a proposition like that? "

" No, indeed. Craven's a square shooter, for all he's a crusty old file. He'll watch the game with an unprejudiced eye, and I think we can sell it to him, especially if we win. He hates being beaten worse than anything, you know. In point of fact, we had little choice. If our horses had to make a twelve mile practise march with full field kit in the morning, we'd have been sunk. That would have given him just the excuse he needed to stop polo here. Oh, hello, Evelyn."

"What luck, Scotty?"

Evelyn Bennitt's face was anxious as she voiced her inquiry. When her father had been sent to the States on temporary duty, the girl had taken it upon herself to watch over the interests of the polo team, whose very existence was threatened by Major Craven's uninformed opposition to the game.

"Good luck, Evelyn. Both players and horses excused from the march tomorrow."

"Three cheers!" she exclaimed. "Scotty, you could sell a blind man a reading glass. Did he give in gracefully?"

"Gracefully, nothing. Listen to what that idiot, Scotty, did, Evelyn."

Captain Kildare wrathfully told her of the bargain which Scott had made. The girl's face paled for an instant, and then brightened.

"It won't matter," she said cheerfully. "This is the last game of the season, and Daddy will be home in two months. Then you can start playing again."

"No, we can't," replied Scott soberly. "We've given our word that we'll do as he says. It was the only way we could gain our point. This gives us a chance tomorrow, anyway."

"A chance? Why, we'll win, won't we, Scotty?"

Scott ran his thin, sinewy hand over his close-cropped blond curls and stared grimly into the distance for a moment before he spoke.

"We've got to win," he said soberly, "or polo is at an end here. The major won't stand the shock of seeing us licked. I hope we pull the game out of the fire, but it's no cinch. Those redlegs can play polo."

"But we can play better."

"Man for man, I think we can, but they have four horses to our three. They have thoroughbreds, too, big ones and fast, while we have only little Costa Rican bred Arabs. On this hard, dry ground, they'll have the legs on us."

"But you've got Frog."

"He's only good for two chukkers, you know. I'll play him first and fifth, and Courtesy second and sixth. That'll give me Chocolate and Spider to finish on. We'll do our best, Evelyn. Anyway, the Artillery will know they've been playing polo when it's over, no matter what the final score is."

Scott retired early. Despite the impending championship game, he dropped off to sleep quickly. An hour later, a crash of thunder awakened him. From without came a whisper of sound which rapidly grew into a steady drumming. A full two weeks earlier than usual, the first rain of the wet season was falling.

“What a break!” cried Scott when he realized that it was no mere dust-laying sprinkle, but a real downpour. “This evens it up a lot. A soft field will slow down their long-legged thoroughbreds and make them uncertain of their footing. Our native ponies will stand it better. Yes, sir, Lady Luck is smiling on us.”

The rain stopped with the coming of dawn, and the morning was bright and clear. The surface of the ground dried, but it was still wet and slippery under the dry crust when Scott arrived at the field at three o’clock. Major Craven was waiting at the Cavalry mounting paddock.

“I have kept my promise, Mr. Scott,” he said curtly. “I will expect you to keep yours.”

“I will, sir, provided you still ask me to after the game. You’ll see a good game today, sir.”

“I’ll watch it critically and impartially.”

“That’s all I ask, sir. Excuse me, that’s the warning gong for the first chukker.”

The major turned and walked toward his box. Orderlies led out the four horses with which the Nineteenth had chosen to open the game. On the opposite side of the field, four riders, wearing the crimson and white of the Artillery, were mounting tall thoroughbreds, not one of them under fifteen-three. The Artillery team took the field first, their privilege as visitors.

Scott stroked Frog's nose affectionately as he glanced around at his teammates. They were standing by their horses. Kildare nodded, and Scott vaulted lightly onto Frog's back. The horse rose on his hind legs, made a half turn, and bolted out onto the field. Scott, carefully fitting the thong of his mallet to his right thumb, paid no attention to his mount. To the center of the field Frog raced at full speed. He stopped so quickly that his hoofs scored long grooves in the brown turf. A roar of applause went up from the Cavalry bleachers. Kildare and Lacey trotted out to join him.

" Ready, Cavalry? " asked the senior umpire.

Kildare glanced around to assure himself that Major Caldwell, the Cavalry Back, was in position.

" Ready, sir! " he called.

" Ready, Artillery? "

" Ready, sir! "

The umpire's whistle sounded, and a white ball bounded out onto the brown of the burned turf. It passed untouched between Kildare and Renfrew, the Artillery Number One. Both men abandoned their positions and rode past one another, intent on their missions, to ride down the opposing Backs.

The ball bounded on. Frog gave a sudden spring and stopped, immediately over it. In a moment, Twill, the Artillery Number Two, and Curtis, the Artillery Number Three, were crowding on Scott, trying to hook the ball out from under Frog with their mallets. Lacey rode off for a few yards, knowing what was coming. Suddenly Frog threw his hindquarters to one side, uncovering the ball for Scott's shot. There came the clean crack of maple against willow root, and the white sphere was flying toward the waiting Lacey.

Guided by a touch of Scott's spur, Frog swung around and charged down the field, Curtis after him. Again came a clean crack. Lacey's mallet had found the ball, and he was off after it toward the Artillery goal, well ahead of Twill. Moore, the Artillery Back, rode to intercept the sphere, but Lacey was following it too close. Moore sheered off to avoid interfering, and Lacey shot it across the field to Kildare.

The Cavalry Number One sent it on still further toward the goal. The delay was enough to allow Twill to come through and send the ball toward the center of the field with a backhand shot. It travelled only a few feet before Scott's mallet reversed its direction and returned it toward Kildare and Moore. Moore swung quickly, but missed his stroke. Kildare, coming from behind him, smacked the white sphere cleanly through the goal posts for the Cavalry's first score.

The teams changed goals and lined up again. As he rode past the commanding officer's box, Scott stole a quick glance toward it. Major Craven was leaning back in his chair with a bored expression. Scott's heart sank. The first goal had been a good example of clean, fast polo, and he had hoped to see the major's interest aroused.

The ball was thrown in again between the lined-up players. Lacey touched it with his mallet, but not enough to stop it. For a minute the players milled around, and then Twill managed to make a short shot out into the clear. Renfrew was waiting, and his mallet sent the ball sixty yards down the field. Hardly had his stroke sounded, than Frog was charging after the bounding sphere. At his heels thundered Curtis' heavy charger. It was nip and tuck, but the heavy field told. Frog got there first by a nose, and Scott caught the ball with a clean backstroke and returned it to the center of the field.

Twill met it and drove it again into Cavalry territory. Lacey followed, but he was too late. Curtis took the ball from Twill. With three superb shots, he ran it down the field. Caldwell tried to break up the attack, but Renfrew rode him too close. They charged past the ball, and Curtis came through to try for a goal. The angle was a difficult one, and the white sphere rolled harmlessly over the back-line.

The umpire rode up and placed another ball on the back-line. Major Caldwell rode out to knock it in. He made a short shot to the waiting Lacey, who took the ball and started down the field, only to top his second shot and override. Curtis tried to make a return, but Scott crowded him close and the two men rode side by side past the motionless sphere. Caldwell, coming from the back-line, struck clean, and sent it down the field.

Like a flash, Frog whirled and tore after the ball. Curtis followed close, but Scott leaned far over the neck of his galloping pony, and smacked it cleanly toward the goal.

Frog did not slacken his speed, but the longer legs of Curtis' big thoroughbred told. The two horses were side by side as they swept past the ball, so close that neither Scott nor the Artilleryman could swing his mallet. The tall thoroughbred could not check his gait as quickly as could the smaller Arab, and

Scott sent the ball far down the field with a backhand stroke as Frog reared and turned.

Kildare tried to ride off the Artillery Back, but Moore's horse was too fast. The ball came flying back toward Scott. He met it and sent it once more toward the goal posts. Twill met the attack this time, but Kildare rode him off. Like a flying arrow, Scott came through to send over his team's second tally with a clean shot from a wide angle.

The teams had hardly lined up and the throw-in made before the gong sounded. Scott hooked the ball and sent it out from the central mêlée, but Lacey's first shot went over the side-boards to end the chukker.

As he rode past the commanding officer's box, Major Craven's voice stopped him.

" I'm no judge, Mr. Scott, but it seemed to me that you played very well. I got quite interested. Evidently we have the best team."

" The game isn't over yet, sir," answered Scott with a grin. " I didn't play much that chukker, it was Frog who played for me. Given enough horses of his caliber, we'd win in a walk, but he's the only one in the string."

" We're two ahead, aren't we? "

" Only one, sir. You see, our team has a combined handicap of five goals, and I carry four of that. They have a handicap of four goals, spread over three players, Twill, Curtis, and Moore. That gives them a net handicap of one goal, which is added to their score. That reduces our lead to one. We can lose that in thirty seconds of play. I have a hunch that they have better horses than they've used. We've played our best ones this chukker."

"Well, my best wishes for winning."

"Thank you, sir."

Scott's prophecy was correct. In the second chukker, neither team scored, but in the third, while Scott was riding the nervous Pedro, who failed him repeatedly at critical moments, the Artillery broke loose to score two goals to the Nineteenth's none. In the fourth chukker they scored two more, while Scott, riding Cordwood, managed to shoot one lone tally. Major Craven left his box and joined the team during the intermission between halves.

"They seem to be beating us, Mr. Scott," he observed severely. "I may not approve of polo, but I don't like to see a team representing my regiment defeated at anything."

"The worst is yet to come, sir," replied Scott grimly. "Here is where economy in the allotment of horses to polo will tell. They will start the second half with all fresh mounts, while we must play the next two chukkers on tired horses."

" At that, you'll have Frog and Courtesy, Scotty," said Kildare. " Either of them tired is worth more than Pedro fresh."

" Oh, we're not licked yet," said Scott with a momentary grin, " but we've got to play some polo to overcome that lead. Now listen, you fellows. Don't spare your horses for the next two chukkers. If they last through, it's all we can hope for. We'll have fresh mounts to finish up on, you know."

The warning gong sounded and the teams lined up. As the ball rolled onto the field, Frog shot forward and stopped directly over it. For a few moments the horses milled around over it, and then Scott hooked it out of the mêlée and sent it to Lacey, who sent it far down the field. Frog charged after it. Despite the hard first chukker, he showed no signs of fatigue. Like a scourging flame, he shot back and forth across the field, tirelessly following the ball. Scott's mallet swung with deadly accuracy. Twice he fed the ball to Kildare, who was blocked once, but made a goal on his second chance. The third time that Scott got the ball, the field was open, and he carried it down the field with two long shots and put over the Cavalry's second tally unaided. Major Caldwell outrode Renfrew and blocked every effort of the Artillery to score. The chukker ended with the score tied, five to five.

Back and forth the game seesawed. The Artillery made one goal at the start of the sixth chukker, but Scott, again on Courtesy, tied the score once more with a marvellous backhand shot, made after the time gong had sounded.

The seventh chukker opened auspiciously, with Lacey getting the ball on the throw-in and relaying it to Scott. Scott ran it down the field and delivered it to Kildare, who sent it through the goal posts. On the next throw-in, the Artillery duplicated the Cavalry's feat, Renfrew coming up from the Cavalry back-line to shoot the tally. The chukker ended in a dog fight up and down the field with the score again tied, seven to seven.

As he rode past Major Craven's box, Scott stole occasional glances toward it. The commanding officer had forgotten his dislike of polo, and was seated on the edge of his chair, following each stroke with his whole heart. Scott grinned to himself. The medicine was working. Now, if the Nineteenth could only manage to win!

"This tells the tale," said Kildare to his teammates as they mounted for the last chukker. "How does everyone feel?"

"Dead from the waist up," admitted Lacey.

"I don't doubt it, I feel the same way. How about it, Scott?"

" I'm rather pegged, I'll admit, but they're just as tired as we are, probably more so with the heavy horses they've been handling. We've got to play this chukker like we never played before. Don't spare your horses or yourselves. Remember, we've got to win. Now, no more milling around and standing over the ball. Play an open game and keep them moving."

He gathered Spider's reins and rode out onto the field. The ball was thrown in and the chukker was on. Renfrew got the ball and sent it into Cavalry territory, but Major Caldwell promptly returned it to the center of the field. Back and forth it went, neither side being able to break through the other's defense. Suddenly there was a sharp crack and the ball rolled free into the unoccupied center of the field. From opposite sides of the field, Scott and Twill charged for it. On they came until a collision seemed inevitable. At the crucial moment, Scott touched Spider with his spur. The horse swerved sharply to the left and Scott raised his mallet. The blow never fell. Spider's feet slipped on the torn-up turf. He tried gallantly to hold his footing, but his speed was against him. His feet flew up and he went down with a crash. Scott leaped to free himself. He cleared the horse and thought himself safe, but the safety on his stirrup-leather refused to yield. He was dragged to the ground under the falling Spider. Twill swung his horse wide and leaped to the ground to assist his opponent.

Spider struggled to his feet, but Scott lay motionless. A medical officer, accompanied by two orderlies bearing a litter, ran hastily onto the field. Beside them ran another figure. Major Craven had vaulted over the rail of his box, and was hurrying to the side of his injured subordinate.

As the four men reached him, Scott opened his eyes and sat up.

" How's Spider? " he asked in a shaky voice as Twill helped him to his feet. A sudden spasm of pain crossed his face.

" Are you injured, Mr. Scott? " asked Major Craven anxiously.

" I'm all right, sir, just a little shaken. How's Spider? "

He walked unsteadily over to his mount. He took the reins in his left hand, and again a quickly suppressed expression of pain clouded his face. He shifted the reins to his other hand.

" Hurt much, Scotty? " demanded Kildare in an undertone.

" My left wrist seems bunged up a little, but I think I'm all right. Don't worry."

He pulled on Spider's reins. A groan burst from his lips as he saw that the horse was badly lamed.

" I say, Scott, let's call this game off," exclaimed Twill. " You're hurt, and so is your horse. A tie will suit us, and we can play it off in a month, or whenever you're ready."

A hurried chorus of assent came from the other three crimson-clad riders. Scott smiled a wry smile at Twill.

" Thanks, old man, that's mighty sporting of you," he said, " but we might never be able to play it off. Just give me time to get my wrist taped and a fresh mount, and we'll be ready to go."

" Have you got a spare horse? I'll be glad to lend you one," said Twill. " We have six extras on our string that haven't been played yet, and you can have your choice of our played horses. Emperor, that big fellow I played in the first chukker, ought to be well rested by now, and he's a dandy."

" Thanks, old man, but I'll use a Cavalry horse."

" Would you care to ride my charger, Mr. Scott? " asked Major Craven suddenly.

" No, thank you, sir. I'm going to ride Frog."

" But he's played two full chukkers already," protested Kildare.

" All the same, he's the only one I'll trust."

He led the limping Spider off the field and superintended the resaddling of Frog.

" How bad is your wrist, Scotty? " asked Kildare anxiously.

" Broken, I think. Anyway, it's useless. That's why I want Frog. I can control him without reins."

A wild cheer greeted the reappearance of Frog and Scott on the field. The teams lined up and the ball was thrown toward the boards. Scott touched Frog with his spur, and the wily pony repeated the trick which had given his master the ball on the first throw-in of the game. He jumped forward over the ball, then swung his hindquarters around to uncover it for Scott's mallet. In a moment it was careening down the field. Curtis intercepted it and sent it back to Lacey, who again drove it forward. Twill and Lacey rode side by side and Twill stopped the ball with a backhand stroke. Before Curtis could reach it, Scott's mallet had repaired the damage and the ball hurtled on toward the Artillery goal. Frog followed it up. Suddenly the reins slipped from Scott's nerveless fingers and flew forward over Frog's head. The horse skidded to a stop.

" Go on, boy! " cried Scott, through lips grey with pain.

Frog started forward, only to stop as the reins swung before him. Scott reached forward and tried to grasp them with the fingers of his crippled hand. The crack of maple against willow-root sounded from ahead and the ball came bounding toward them. Frog bowed his head and put his foot on the reins. He raised his head with a sharp jerk. His browband gave and his bridle fell on the ground before him.

Frog looked up and saw the ball approaching. He whirled and put his rider in position. Scott drove the sphere back toward Twill. The Artilleryman missed it clean and Scott rode past him to drive it over toward Kildare. Before Kildare could reach it, Curtis rode in and his mallet swung true. Frog reared and turned. As he did, Twill shot past him. The Artillery Number Two had the ball again, and he sent it toward the Cavalry goal. Major Caldwell tried to intercept it, but Renfrew rode him off. Before Lacey or Scott could close up, Twill struck again. The ball flew on down the field, but went wide of the goal posts and rolled harmlessly over the back-line.

" Knock in, Caldwell," cried Kildare as the umpire placed a ball on the back-line. Caldwell rode out, but Frog charged after him.

" Didn't Kildare say for me to knock in? " asked Major Caldwell in surprise.

" He did, but Frog doesn't approve, and he's playing this game, not me. Get in and let me have it."

Caldwell rode in and Scott turned Frog. He signalled for a slow approach and a short shot to the left to Lacey, but Frog disobeyed him. He reared for a moment, then charged. Scott had no choice. He smote the ball down the field with his whole strength, Frog after it at full speed. Twill rode to meet it, but Frog was too fast. Scott's mallet again found the ball and it bounded toward the Artillery goal. Curtis in turn tried to intercept it, but Frog, flecks of foam flying from his jaws, was head of him. Again Scott struck the ball true, and it bounded on toward the goal posts. Moore rode past it and stopped it with a topped shot. Frog made a desperate leap, fully twenty feet straight ahead, and landed at a standstill, directly over the ball. The jolt almost threw Scott from his saddle, but he managed to stick on. Moore rode up, but before he could arrive within striking distance, Frog had leaped sideways and uncovered the ball. Scott swung his mallet, and the ball rolled square between the goal posts. As it did, the clanging gong sounded the end of the game.

Scott raised himself in his saddle for an instant, and then slumped. Slowly he slid off his horse and crumpled in a heap on the field.

When he opened his eyes in the post hospital an hour later, Major Craven was sitting by the side of his bed.

" Is Frog all right, sir? " was Scott's first question.

" He's all right, Mr. Scott. Baker and Winsoton are rubbing him down in the intervals of arguing about chicken dinners, and I have the veterinarian standing by to see that they do the job properly. You'll play many more games on Frog, Mr. Scott."

" Then you won't stop polo, sir? " asked Scott, the trace of a grin on his face.

" Stop polo? Of course not! " snorted the major indignantly. " It's the finest developer of men and horses there is. I've never seen such teamwork or such cold nerve displayed by men, or such intelligence displayed by horses in my life as I saw this afternoon. You and Frog have sold polo to me. From now on, I give it my heartiest support. That last goal you played was a wonderful bit of polo, Mr. Scott."

Scott's grin widened.

" Go down to the corral and tell that to Frog, Major," he advised. " He played that goal, not me. All I did was to swing a stick at the right time."

VIII

TRUSTWORTHY

First call for evening parade sounded melodiously over Empire. Lieutenant Scott emerged from the bachelor quarters, his riding gloves in one hand and a slice of fresh pineapple in the other. On his left wrist was a six inch wide binding of tape, but aside from that he showed no effects of the fall he had taken during the championship game, almost a month earlier.

Frog gave a whicker of satisfaction at the sight of his master. Although saddled for parade and standing at the hitching rack, the horse was not tied. With his reins dropped to the ground, he stood as motionless as though hewn from granite.

Scott handed him the pineapple and stroked his satiny neck while he ate it. When he had finished with the tidbit, Scott gathered the reins, tossed them over Frog's neck, then vaulted lightly into the saddle.

" Steady, Frog," he said as the horse made a playful curvette. At the sound of his voice, Frog ceased his prancing and started down the road past Officer's Line at a sedate walk. The lieutenant paid no attention to his mount, but carefully drew on his gloves, the neglected reins dropping loosely on Frog's neck.

In front of Captain Rembrandt's quarters, his friend, Elsie, was waiting for him.

" Oh, Scotty," she called, " I want to ask a favor of you."

Frog stopped dead at a touch of Scott's knees. The lieutenant smiled at the eager-eyed child who faced him with flushed cheeks.

" Name your poison, Lady," he said laughingly. " I mean, what are you going to work me for now? "

" Are you going to ride Frog tomorrow morning? "

"I hadn't given the matter any thought, Elsie. Why?"

"Because, if you aren't, I'd—I'd like to—to borrow him."

"What are you planning to do, start a bologna factory?"

"Of course not!" She looked up indignantly, caught the smile which lurked in Scott's eyes and laughed. Few grown-ups, and no children could resist Scott's infectious smile. "I'll tell you," she went on quickly, the words tumbling from her lips in rapid eagerness. "Sergeant Winsoton is going into the jungle tomorrow to get oranges and I want Frog ——"

Scott held up an arresting hand.

"Let Sergeant Winsoton ride Frog?" he exclaimed in mock horror. "Never. Frog isn't a truck horse."

"Of course not, Scotty," cried the girl. "He always rides Blaze, the spare fire-horse."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Scott, the twinkle still persisting in his eye. "I'd been wondering what was the matter with Blaze. He's been looking awfully worn out lately. But go on with your story. What do you want with Frog, if you aren't going to let Winsoton ride him?"

"Why, it's this way," said the child eagerly. "I asked Daddy if I could go with Sergeant Winsoton and he said I could, if I could get a safe horse. I asked him if Frog would do, and he laughed and said yes. Will you lend him to me?"

Scott's merry laugh rang out.

"I smell a rat," he declared. "Does your father know that you've been riding Frog on the quiet?"

"No, I haven't told anyone. You said not to."

"Just as I suspected. Your father thinks he has found a nice, diplomatic 'out' on letting you go. You tell him that you've been riding Frog on the quiet for the last week. If he's still willing for you to go on him, you may have him."

"Oh, thanks, Scotty, thanks ever so much."

"You're welcome, Elsie. Have a good time."

Scott touched Frog with his spur. The beautifully trained horse turned toward the parade ground, while Elsie Rembrandt, her blue eyes shining, turned and ran into her house. While Scott was at supper, Captain Rembrandt called him on the telephone.

"Do you think it's safe for Elsie to ride Frog tomorrow, Scott?" he asked. "He's a pretty spirited horse, you know."

"Spirited, yes, sir, but thoroughly trustworthy. He's a perfect gentleman, and would never misbehave with a child up. Elsie has ridden him every afternoon for a week, and she handles him perfectly."

"Well, you know your horse, Scott. I don't want to baby Elsie, and if you think it's safe, I'll let her go."

"I'm sure it's safe, sir. Besides, Sergeant Winsoton will be along. He's a very dependable man, you know."

"Yes, I know that, Scott. Well, all right, she can go."

Scott chuckled as he hung up the receiver. "She'll be as safe on Frog as on any horse I ever rode," he said to himself. He telephoned Sergeant Baker to put Elsie's saddle on Frog in the morning, and to send up Pedro for Scott's own riding.

There was dismay in Elsie Rembrandt's face as she faced Sergeant Baker at the corral the next morning.

"Sergeant Winsoton isn't here?" she cried.

"No, Miss Elsie. He was taken sick in the night and he's in the hospital. He said to tell you that he'd be out in three or four days and that he'd go after oranges with you then."

"But I can't go in three or four days. Daddy won't let me go except on Frog, and I borrowed him for today. Can't you go with me?"

" I'm afraid not, Miss Elsie. I'm pretty busy today."

The girl turned away with a disappointed face. " It's maddening," she declared. " I had it all fixed up to go and get some early oranges for Christmas, and then something had to go and spoil it. Now I don't know what to do."

Sergeant Baker thought rapidly.

" Why don't you take Frog, and go up the Paja Road a couple of miles and get some lemons? " he asked.

" I suppose I might as well," she said, " but I did want to go into the jungle. I've never been in during the wet season. Well, anyway, I'll get to ride Frog. Lend me a barracks bag, will you, Sergeant? "

" Surely, Miss Elsie." He tied a heavy white bag which would hold about a bushel and a half to the cantle of her saddle, then helped her to mount. " Have a good time, Miss Elsie," he called after her.

" Thanks, Sergeant, I will. I'll return your bag tomorrow."

She rode slowly through the post toward the end of the Paja Road. She carried herself proudly, wished that her father could see her as she rode the best polo pony on the post, holding him under perfect control. Frog stepped along with a dainty, mincing gait, holding his head high, as though proud of his burden.

Once clear of the post, Elsie touched him with her spur. He broke into a distance-eating trot, a gait that would carry him tirelessly at eight miles an hour for half a day at a time, even through tropic heat.

As she rode along, an idea formed in Elsie's brain. She could go after lemons any day. Now that she had Frog, why not go into the jungle alone and get some oranges? The trail was an open one, and she knew that the Tavares Grove was only two miles from the main road. She had specially planned on some oranges of her own picking for Christmas. Once the idea took root, it was not easily dislodged, and she ignored the groves of lemon trees which grew alongside the Paja Road. At the sight of the trail leading off toward the grove, her hesitation vanished.

" Come on, Frog, we'll do it," she cried, and turned him off the road.

The trail was open and well marked. Her spirits rose at the thought of the adventure. She rounded a rocky knoll and a stretch of open savanna lay before her. A mile away she could see a grove of trees with dark green, shiny leaves.

" I don't see why I should keep to this trail," she said to herself. " The last time I came out here with

Daddy, I'm sure we went straight across this place to the grove."

She turned Frog's head out of the trail. He went forward a few feet, then stopped and snorted. She urged him forward. He made a few gingerly steps, then whirled and bolted back to the trail. It was well that he did so, for this was the middle of the wet season and places which were readily passable a few months earlier, were treacherous bogs now. Before Frog reached the hard ground, he sank half-way to his hock-joints in thick sucking mud. Elsie's cheek paled as he struggled back to the hard trail.

" Good horse," she said, stroking his neck. " You know what you're doing, don't you, Frog? We'll stick to the trail."

Fifteen minutes of riding brought them to the edge of the grove. Elsie gave a cry of disappointment as she looked at the trees. They were loaded with fruit, but the oranges were no larger than lemons, and were a bright green in color.

" It's a shame," she cried. " I know it's early, but Sergeant Winsoton told me there would be some ripe ones. I won't find a single one here fit to take home."

A sudden thought pierced her disappointment. Sergeant Winsoton had told her that they might not find any at the Tavares Grove, but that he knew another one, deep in the jungle, where the fruit ripened earlier. His description of the route was crystal clear in her mind.

"The trail starts at the far side of this grove," she said. "It branches in half a mile and you take the left fork. I'll see if I can find it."

She gathered Frog's reins and rode through the grove. On the far side a trail led straight away into the deep jungle. Elsie hesitated.

"I don't know the road," she confessed to herself, "but Sergeant Winsoton said there was only one fork. I wouldn't get lost. Anyway, if I did, I could give Frog his head. He'd find his way back to the post."

With this comforting thought in her mind, she rode off into the jungle. At the fork she turned left into a trail which was almost overgrown.

"I wish I had someone here with a machete to clear the trail," she said, "but I expect we can break through. We'll try, anyway, won't we, Frog?"

In half a mile she regretted that she had gone on. The tough lianas which grew across the trail threatened to sweep her from the saddle. She debated turning back, but a stubborn streak of pride in her nature forbade such a course. Crouching low in the saddle, she urged Frog on.

For three miles she forced her way until the trail opened up into a glade, grown high with underbrush, and lush, rank vegetation. She gave a cry of delight. Before her were dozens of orange trees, loaded with large oranges. Most of them were green, but quite a few had a golden blush, and some were evidently quite ripe. She would have no trouble filling her bag here.

She rode under the lofty trees and tried to reach the fruit. These trees were different from the low, squatty trees of the Tavares Grove. Most of the oranges, including all the ripe ones, were out of her reach. She dropped Frog's reins over his head and took her feet from the stirrups. Gingerly she raised herself until she stood on the saddle, but still only a few of the oranges were within reach, even with this added elevation. She would have to climb to get them.

She fastened the barracks bag to her belt, then stood once more on the saddle to reach a low-growing branch. She caught it, but withdrew her hand with an exclamation of disgust. Termites had attacked the living trees, and her hands had broken into one of their runways. She wiped the yellow slugs from her fingers with a grimace of distaste. Setting her teeth, she caught the limb again and swung herself up into the tree.

In a few minutes she had a dozen fine oranges in her bag. An unusually luscious bunch a few feet out along a limb attracted her. Balancing herself carefully, she worked her way out along it. They were almost within reach. She moved a few feet further, then gave a cry of alarm. The limb sagged beneath her with an ominous, cracking sound.

She strove to retreat, but it was too late. The termites had bored deeper into the limb than she had realized. With a tearing, rending sound it snapped off. Elsie gave a scream as she was hurtled off into the air. She strove desperately to grasp a limb, but in vain. She struck the ground with a dull thud, the broken limb beside her. She lay quiet, in a curiously crumpled heap.

As her scream rang out, followed by the crash of her fall, Frog gave a sudden leap forward. His trailing reins halted him. He paused, trembling like a leaf, his eyes rolling wildly. His fear soon passed. He made a cautious step toward his fallen mistress. He recoiled with a backward leap as a sudden hiss smote his ear. Coiled in the herbage was the reddish, yellow-brown of a six foot *fer-de-lance*. The snake uncoiled and came forward, ready for battle. Frog backed away, snorting. The snake glided menacingly toward him.

Frog whirled about to run. His hindquarters struck a fallen branch. With a squeal of terror, he lashed out with both heels. The branch flew through the air and landed beside Elsie.

At the crash behind him, the snake paused and whipped into a coil, ready to deal his almost universally fatal blow. The limb which Frog had kicked, settled with a sharp crackling. The snake instantly glided in that direction, straight toward the unconscious girl. Two feet from her hip it paused, whipped itself into a coil. Its head drew far back, then shot forward almost quicker than the eye could follow.

The head shot forward, but before it could land, a steel-shod hoof flashed between the death-laden fangs and the unconscious girl. Frog had whirled about when he had kicked, just in time to see the snake, as he supposed, retreat. With a squeal of rage, he had charged after it with flashing hoofs.

The deadly blow struck harmless against the hard hoof. The snake drew back its head for another blow, but Frog, when aroused, could move as swiftly as the snake itself. His hoofs crashed down on the coils, breaking the snake's back in a dozen places. It writhed in pain and lashed out with its fangs, but Frog avoided the blows of the crippled viper with ease. Again and again the vicious hoofs fell with deadly effect until the snake was a mere battered mass of dead flesh. Still the horse did not pause until he had pounded it into a pulp. Then, and only then, did he turn his attention to the still motionless girl.

He nuzzled her softly and whinnied in her ear. He pawed at her gently, strove to roll her over with his nose, but she was wedged in a bush so that he could not move her. He whinnied his distress to the jungle, but there was no answer. Slowly memory came to the horse. Once before he had seen his rider, Scott that time, unconscious before him. When he could not rouse him, he had galloped to the post and brought back aid. Scott had praised him and fed him pineapples to repletion the next day. Evidently that was the thing to do. Frog turned and started for the post.

He had gone but a few steps when another thought halted him in his stride. That snake! He came back at a gallop. The snake lay motionless, but the heavy reptilian odor which told of death hung heavy over him. With flashing hoofs, Frog drove again and again at the battered flesh. Satisfied at last that it represented no present menace, he once more strove to rouse Elsie. His efforts were fruitless. Again he started for the post, but returned after a few steps to still further maul the dead snake. The problem was too much for Frog to solve. At the post he could get help, but to leave his mistress would be to expose her to that death which Frog could not be sure would not rouse itself at any moment and strike. He planted himself between the girl and the viper and stood guard, ready for instant attack should the snake stir.

Pedro had been brought to Scott's quarters that morning as he had ordered. The lieutenant mounted him and rode off to drill. Various duties kept him occupied most of the morning and it was after eleven when he rode to the corral for his morning inspection. A glance at the picket line told him that Frog had not returned.

"Sergeant Winsoton isn't back yet?" he asked the stable sergeant.

"Winsoton is in the hospital, sir," Baker answered.

"He is? What's the matter?" asked Scott quickly.

"Well, sir," replied Baker, with a grin, "it's a mixture of too much luck and bad judgment as to his capacity. You see, he won a good many chicken dinners on the big game last month, and Tubby doesn't exactly hate chicken. Well, he was in town last night and he ran up against two artillerymen who each owed him a dinner. They both had the money and offered to pay up then and there, or else never. So Tubby had to either eat two dinners—or lose one. He thought he could manage to get away with both of them so he tried. He succeeded. He ate those two dinners right through from soup to dessert, a double order of fried chicken in each one. He was a little purple when he got through, but he didn't say much. He just came home and laid down. During the night it got him, and we had to take him up to the hospital with acute indigestion. He'll be all right after they starve him for a week or so, but right now, if you say ' chicken,' he's liable to heave a rock at you."

Scott laughed. " Where's Frog this morning? " he asked, with a glance at the picket line.

" Miss Elsie got him this morning, sir. I put her saddle on him like the lieutenant told me to. She meant to go into the jungle with Winsoton, but after she found out what happened to him, she borrowed a barracks bag from me and went out along the Paja Road after lemons. That was at eight o'clock. She ought to be back any minute now."

Scott's face was grave as he glanced at his watch.

" Three hours and a quarter," he muttered. " She ought to be back, even if she went clear to Paja. Of course, she's safe on Frog, but I wish she had someone along with her." He sat his horse a moment in thought, then turned to Sergeant Baker. " I'm going out along the Paja Road to meet her," he said

"She may be having trouble tying her bag to her saddle—or something may have happened. If one of us isn't back here in two hours, start search parties out. Meanwhile, don't give out any alarm, and if Mrs. Rembrandt calls you, tell her I'm with Elsie. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Scott turned his mount toward Paja. Once clear of the post, he clapped his spurs into Pedro and tore off toward the Zone line at a gallop, in utter defiance of the midday sun. He passed two lemon groves near the road, but a hasty examination told him that neither Frog nor Elsie had been there.

"I'll bet a month's pay to a Panamanian dime that she went into the jungle alone," he muttered.

Three miles from the post a trail led off to the right toward the Tavares Grove. Scott dismounted and examined the ground carefully. He gave an exclamation of satisfaction as his eye fell on a track made by a horse shod with a long inside trail on his hind feet. He had shod Frog that way himself a week before to overcome a slight tendency to interfere. It was proof that Elsie had come that way. He vaulted into the saddle and rode on.

As he came in sight of the grove, the torn-up ground attracted his attention. He vaulted off Pedro and studied the tracks. With no difficulty he read the story of the ill-advised attempt to send Frog off the trail straight to the grove, and of the horse's gallant fight back to hard ground.

" She was all right when she left here—thanks to Frog," he said as he rode on.

Frog's footmarks were thick around the trees of the Tavares Grove. Scott studied the unripe fruit speculatively.

" She couldn't have got any oranges here," he said. " And no track leads back toward the road. She must have gone on to the Comegys Grove, or else the Alconte."

He rode on through the grove and studied the trail leading into the dense jungle. Again he found Frog's tracks, still leading away from the post. He touched Pedro with his spur.

For a mile the trail led through unbroken walls of jungle, then forked and went in two directions. A glance at the torn lianas on the left-hand fork told Scott which way Elsie had gone. Even without this evidence, the way was clear, for Frog's tracks were plain in the oozy mud.

The trail mounted rapidly, became dry and rocky underfoot. The jungle pressed in until there was barely room for Pedro to squeeze through the thick underbrush. Frog had left no tracks on the hard ground underfoot, but dozens of broken branches and severed creepers bore testimony to his passage. Scott pressed his mount mercilessly. Sweat poured from him in streams in the dank, steaming heat of the jungle, while flecks of lather fell from Pedro's heaving flanks.

One last steep climb brought him to the edge of the grove. Unlike the comparatively open Tavares Grove, the Alconte Grove was grown up with dense brush which hid the lower part of the lofty trees composing it. Scott halted Pedro and stared around. There was no sign of either Frog or Elsie. He raised his voice in a loud halloo. From the brush a hundred yards away, a shrill whinny answered him.

" Frog! " he cried in relief.

He forced Pedro through the brush until he reached the more open space where Frog stood. At the sight of Elsie's prostrate figure he vaulted from his saddle with a cry of alarm.

" Policed! " he cried in dismay as he bent over her. He glanced up at the tree, and his face cleared. " No, she wasn't," he said. " She was climbing and she fell."

He laid his hand against her cheek, started as he found it cold despite the humid heat of the grove. Her left foot was twisted sideways in an unnatural manner. With deft fingers he examined it.

" Ankle badly sprained . . . or broken," he decided. " Suffering from shock, too."

He straightened up, almost under Frog's nose. Frog moved sideways, then returned and struck viciously at the ground. Scott's cheek paled under his tan as he saw what the horse was pawing.

" A *fer-de-lance!"* he cried. " If it hit her, she's done for."

He kicked the mangled snake to one side and bent over the girl. The scream of a horse in terror smote his ears. He had kicked the remains of the reptile almost under Pedro's nose. The sight of the snake completed the rout of Pedro, already trembling at the reptilian odor of the glade. His hoofs thundered down the trail toward home and safety.

Scott followed him for a few steps, then turned and came back to Elsie. He bent over and laid his ear against her chest, straightened up with an exclamation of relief.

" Heart slow, but strong and steady," he said. " No snake-bite, just shock. I know how to take care of that."

With expert fingers he stripped the saddle from Frog and unwrapped the saddle blanket. He laid Elsie on it, and threw the loose folds over her. His knife soon procured him two straight sticks for splints. He padded them with the barracks bag, then gently straightened her twisted foot. A little moan of pain came from her unconscious lips. With Frog's reins he bound the splints to her leg, then led the horse alongside her.

"You may have a sore back, old fellow," he said as he cinched the saddle into place with no blanket under it, "but it can't be helped. Steady, now."

Frog stood like a rock while Scott laid the unconscious girl across his withers. Once firm in the saddle, the lieutenant picked her up in his arms and held her close, arranging her crippled leg so that it would ride easily. He gave a grimace of pain as her weight came on his injured wrist, then set his teeth and ignored it. He touched Frog with his spur. The horse started down the trail at a sedate walk, Scott easing his burden from the unavoidable jolts as well as he could.

He held her close, hoping that the warmth of his body would help to overcome the coldness which frightened him. Her breath came slowly and in uneven gasps when they started, but as the effects of the heat began to make themselves felt, it came faster and more evenly. As they passed the Tavares Grove a little moan came from her lips. Her eyelids flickered, then rose.

"My leg," she murmured faintly.

"It's twisted a little, but nothing serious," said

Scott with an attempt at cheerfulness. " Are you comfortable? "

There was no reply. Scott shifted her in his rapidly tiring arms, groaned at the agony of his crippled wrist. He began to wonder whether he would be able to support her all the way to the post, but luckily, help was near. Along the trail from the Paja Road came three men at a gallop.

" Hello, Baker," said Scott as they approached. " You're just in time. Send a man to the post at full gallop for an ambulance. Ride alongside me in case my arms give out."

At the Paja Road, Baker and the stable orderly took Elsie from Scott's numb arms and laid her on the ground. They covered her closely with the blanket and began, under Scott's direction, to chafe her hands and arms. It was a matter of only a few minutes before the ambulance clanged up. The post surgeon and Captain Rembrandt jumped out and bent over the girl.

" Nothing to be alarmed about," said the surgeon when he had finished his examination. " Left ankle bunged up some and a bad shock, but she's young and healthy. She'll be all right in a couple of months at the outside. It's a good thing she wasn't left for a couple of hours longer, though."

Captain Rembrandt gulped for a moment before he could trust himself to speak. "Thanks, Scott," he said gruffly. "I suppose she was policed," he added with a venomous glance at Frog.

"No, sir," Scott replied vigorously. "Frog never policed a child in his life. She was climbing after oranges and a limb broke under her. Furthermore," he went on as he noticed the direction of Captain Rembrandt's gaze, "you've got Frog to thank for saving her life, not me. If it hadn't been for him, I would have found a corpse."

In a few graphic words he told of his discovery of the trampled *fer-de-lance* under the tree.

"From all appearances, Frog nailed him just in time," he said. "Then he stood guard over her in case another showed up. Not one horse in ten thousand would have done that. Horses, as a rule, are deathly afraid of snakes, you know. Pedro bolted as soon as he saw the dead body. His arrival was what started Baker after me."

Captain Rembrandt's eyes clouded as he looked at Frog. He moved over and stroked the satiny nose.

"I don't suppose you can understand me, Frog," he said in a husky voice, "but I appreciate what you did, even if I can't tell you. Scotty, is there anything that this horse especially likes?"

"Well," said Scott with a grin, "I've seen him eat pineapples with every evidence of enjoyment. Not too many, though," he hastened to add, " or he'll get tummy-ache. Too much of anything will give it to a horse—or to a man," he added with a chuckle to Baker.

" Then you'd better have the veterinarian stand by, Scotty," said the captain with a tremulous laugh, " because when I tell Mrs. Rembrandt that, she's going to feed him pineapple until he busts."

IX

FROG TAKES A HAND

Private Corcoran rode slowly along the back road which separated the post of Empire from the dense jungle of the Canal Zone. On his right, the beautifully cared for post stood out clearly under the flooding rays of the brilliant tropical moon, but on the other side of the road were darkness and mystery. No moonlight could penetrate through the thick, leafy canopy which grew high overhead. Hardly could a man force his way through the lush undergrowth, welded together almost into a solid mass by the twining lianas and creepers which interlaced their woody stems about the trees and through the low-growing shrubs.

Corcoran checked his horse at a bend in the road, and let his glance roam keenly over the dark and silent jungle.

" This is about the place where Downey was tackled last night," he muttered to himself. He loosened his pistol in its holster, then started slowly on up the road. A slight rustle in the jungle made his hair stand on end. Without an instant of hesitation he turned his horse toward the sound and drew his pistol.

" Come out of there! " he said sharply. " Come out or I'll fire! "

He raised his pistol uncertainly. The silence, broken only by the hum of insect life, got on his nerves. He longed to fire, if only for the relief the shattering report would give to his overstrained nerves.

" Come on out of there! " he commanded sharply.

Absolute silence answered him. Even the hum of the insects was momentarily hushed. Corcoran laughed sheepishly, and slid his pistol back into its holster.

" Gee, I mustn't let my nerve get away from me like that," he said. " Just because some crazy duck tackled Downey last night and cut up his horse, is no sign that he's waiting for me tonight. Hardly a chance of it, in fact."

He shrugged his shoulders, turned his horse about to continue his patrol along the road. As he turned his back on the jungle, a dark, sinister figure glided silently from the darkness. In two long bounds it was at the heels of the horse. A bright steel blade gleamed for an instant in the moonlight, then came the sound of a blow. Corcoran's horse gave a scream of agony and bounded forward. Corcoran pulled leather and barely saved himself from a fall. A wild, eerie laugh sounded in the night. There was a crash as the strange figure disappeared into the dark, impenetrable jungle.

Corcoran quickly recovered his balance. His right hand instinctively sought his pistol while his left swung the reins against his horse's neck. He gripped his mount with his knees, drove home his spurs to whirl him sharply about. The horse rose momentarily on his hind legs, then crashed to the ground. Corcoran freed his feet from the stirrups and leaped free. Pistol in hand, he dashed into the jungle. A few feet ahead of him he heard a rustle as though someone were forcing a way through the thick growth. He threw up his pistol, took hasty aim, and fired. Four times the automatic tore holes in the silence of the night. Corcoran ceased firing and listened. The silence was unbroken, save for the thrashing of his horse, back on the road.

The private plunged forward, intent only on finding the man who had so wantonly attacked his horse. He forced his way through the thick lianas for twenty yards, then paused again. Around him was silence; deep, absolute silence. Corcoran could not see his hand before his face. Gradually his courage began to evaporate. For all that he could tell, the man might be lying in the jungle within a few feet of him. Any moment might see another rush, a swiftly swung machete against which his pistol would be useless in the dark. Slowly he began to back toward the road.

He reached it without molestation. There was a clatter of hoofs as the sergeant of the guard rode up, followed by two privates.

“ What’s up, Corcoran? ” the sergeant demanded.

“ Same thing as happened to Downey last night. The fellow went into the jungle. That direction.”

“ Spread out, men, and we’ll comb the place,” snapped the sergeant. “ Get him; alive if you can, but get him! ”

The three troopers plunged into the dense jungle.

Corcoran turned to his horse. The animal had got to his feet, but when Corcoran tried to lead it, it was evident that the horse's days as a cavalry charger were ended. His near hind leg was useless, and he hobbled pitifully along on three legs. Corcoran led him sadly toward the corral.

" Mr. Scott! "

Scott moved his hand almost imperceptibly, brought his spurs gently against his charger's flanks. Frog stopped in his stride, rose on his hind legs and whirled about. Scott vaulted to the ground and faced the regimental commander, his hand at the salute.

" How is that horse that was cut up last night? " asked Colonel Bennitt.

Scott's face was grave as he moved a few steps forward, Frog following at his heels like a dog.

" I'm afraid he'll have to be shot, sir," he said. " He's completely ham-strung. It was apparently done by a sharp machete in the hands of a powerful man. The blade bit half-way through the bone, sir."

Colonel Bennitt's face set in a portentous frown.

" This must stop, Scott," he said grimly. " We've lost two good horses in as many nights. Tonight, I'm posting double guards along the road, and I'm arming them with riot guns loaded with buckshot. No man that will deliberately ham-string horses like that deserves any better fate than killing."

" No sane man, sir," Scott said quietly.

" What do you mean? "

" Well, sir, I've been doing a little gum-shoeing. Both of those attacks happened on the stroke of midnight, and they were aimed solely at the horses. No attempt was made to injure either Downey or Corcoran. Both of them described the laugh the fiend gave as ' weird.' That doesn't sound like sanity. I telephoned Gamboa this morning. They told me that a lunatic, an alien they were holding for deportation, escaped three days ago after ham-stringing two horses and a mule with a machete he carried away with him. I'm convinced that he's the man who's doing all this."

" Quite likely, Mr. Scott. You are to be commended on your insight. I'll turn out the regiment, and we'll comb every inch of the jungle back of the post until we find him."

" I doubt whether we'll have much luck, sir. You can't see ten feet in that jungle, and there are a thousand places where a man could lie hidden while troopers rode all around him. Besides, there are large areas which are readily accessible to a jungle-trained man on foot, but where a horse could never penetrate. I think we'll have to use other methods."

" You probably know the jungle as well as anyone, Scott. What would you suggest? "

" Well, sir, I'd suggest setting a trap for him, Since his lunacy evidently takes the form of crippling horses, I'd bait it with a horse. If we double the guards on the road, we may just scare him away, and possibly precipitate an attack where we least expect it. If the colonel will let me handle it, I think maybe I can catch him."

" What is your plan, Mr. Scott? "

" I haven't worked out the details yet, sir. Before I make any definite plans, I want to talk it over with Sergeant Winsoton. He has taken the pack-trains through the jungle so much, that he knows it far better than I do. Roughly, my plan is to let a single sentry ride the road as usual, in the hope he'll be attacked. I will have men posted at strategic points to cut off his retreat."

" There seems to me to be a weak point in that plan, Scott. You'll have to lose another horse."

Scott smiled slowly. " I think we can figure out a way to avoid that, sir," he said.

" All right, Scott. I've never yet had occasion to regret letting you have your own way. Make your plans and carry them out. I'm more interested in results than in methods of getting them."

Scott saluted and turned on his heel. Without command, Frog came alongside. The lieutenant vaulted into the saddle, gathered his reins carelessly. As Frog started forward, Colonel Bennitt spoke again.

" You're not going to use Frog as ' bait,' as you call it, are you, Scott? " he asked, a trifle anxiously.

" Hardly, sir," laughed Scott, " but he'll have a vital part in my plans."

Scott touched Frog with his spur and directed him toward the quartermaster corral where the pack-trains were stabled. At his call Sergeant Winsoton hurried up and saluted.

" Winsoton, do you want to earn a chicken dinner? " asked the lieutenant.

Winsoton's ruddy face paled slightly, and a look of distaste spread over his plump countenance.

" Do you know, sir," he said earnestly, " ever since I went to the hospital a month ago and had to eat a Christmas dinner of weak tea and toast, I . . . I haven't cared for chicken so much." His face brightened suddenly. " But if the lieutenant would make it beefsteak, now . . ." he suggested.

Scott's merry laugh rang out.

" All right, I'll make it beefsteak then," he said. " How's this, a beefsteak dinner if you help me out, and toast and tea for a week if you don't."

" I'll help the lieutenant any way I can without anything, sir," said Winsoton earnestly. "So would any other soldier on the post, sir."

"All the same, I'll buy you a dinner if we win out on this deal," laughed Scott. "Go and get Blaze saddled. I want you to take a nice, long ride with me this afternoon."

With the chief cargador on the huge spare fire-horse trotting beside him, Scott rode to the spot where Corcoran's horse had been crippled the night before.

"Now, here's the story, Winsoton," he said. In a few words he told the sergeant of the discovery he had made as to the identity of the attacker. "The way I figure the deal, Sergeant," he went on, "is this. That fellow is hiding out in the jungle somewhere within walking distance of the post. He comes in here at night, makes an attack, and then goes back to his hangout. You know this back country pretty thoroughly. Where do you guess his hiding place is?"

Sergeant Winsoton's eye swept the country.

"He ain't staying in the low jungle, sir," he said. "He must be up in the hills somewhere. There's two or three passes he could take, and until I get some idea of which way he went from here, I couldn't make much of a guess. Let's go into the jungle and hunt his trail, sir."

Leaving their horses in the road, the two men forced their way into the thick jungle. Back and forth they quartered. Suddenly Scott gave an exclamation of triumph which brought Winsoton to his side. A thick liana had been severed by a sweeping cut of a machete. Leading into the interior of the dense jungle was a rough trail cut through the undergrowth.

" That's his trail, all right," said the lieutenant. " We'll follow it until you get the direction."

For half a mile they followed the trail. It wound about, avoiding swampy places where a man would sink to his middle, or deeper, into the treacherous muck, yet it held to its main direction without a change.

" I've got it, sir," said Winsoton at last. " He's heading toward that pass in the hills back of Culebra. Has the lieutenant got a map? "

Scott drew from his shirt pocket a large scale map of the area back of Empire and opened it up. Sergeant Winsoton placed his finger on the map.

" That's the point he's heading for, sir," he said positively.

" I remember the place," said Scott. " There's a savanna just above the pass, isn't there? "

" Yes, sir."

" That suits fine. Now, the only question is, how many trails are there where he could turn off and get to the Paja Road or to the Paraiso Road if men were following him?"

Winsoton thought deeply for a moment.

"There are only three that are practicable, even for a man on foot," he said. "Of course, there may be more, but I have never found but the three. Luckily, each of them is narrow enough that two or three men can block it at the right place. I'll show the lieutenant where they are, if he wants me to."

"Fine," replied Scott. "Let's go back and get the horses."

"And don't let's hurry so, sir, if you please," said Winsoton. "I've been taking the exercises you told me to, and I haven't been eating much, but my wind isn't very good yet. And it's hot in this jungle," he added plaintively.

Scott laughed as he led the way back toward the horses at a slower rate. Winsoton puffed and snorted, but he kept up valiantly. At the road they remounted and rode up the Paja Road. Three times they left the road and entered the jungle by trails so faint that no one knowing the jungle less thoroughly than Winsoton could have ever found them. On each one the sergeant indicated the place where men should be posted.

The last time they did not pause there, but rode on for another mile until the trail intersected a new path hewn through the jungle. Winsoton gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

" I guessed right, sir," he said. " The pass isn't a mile from here and he was heading straight for it."

" I think we've got him cornered," chuckled Scott. " If he makes an attack tonight, he'll run into a little surprise about the time he goes through the pass."

Winsoton hesitated for a moment.

" Would the lieutenant mind telling me just what his plan is, that is, if it isn't a secret, sir? "

" It's no secret from you, at any rate," said Scott. " Here it is in a nutshell. I mean to place men in hiding along the back road tonight. If the chap that's been doing this damage makes another attack, those men will take out after him, making plenty of noise. Meanwhile, I'll place patrols guarding those trails we explored this afternoon, so that, if he tries to cut off onto one of the roads, he'll either be captured or headed back. The object is to drive him to that open savanna."

" I see, sir," cried Winsoton, his plump face beaming with delight, " and we'll be waiting for him right there."

" Correct, only the ' we ' will be Frog and me.

Your job will be posting the patrols on the side trails."

Winsoton's face fell.

"Can't I go with you, sir?" he pleaded. "I want to get in on the fun, sir. Here I've been riding and tramping all day through this—this infernal heat, and I—I think I deserve to go with you, sir."

"You do, at that, Winsoton, but I'm afraid you'll have to post the patrols instead. You see, I plan on catching him by surprise, and I don't know but one horse that I can trust not to neigh or snort when he catches a strange odor at night. I certainly wouldn't trust Blaze—or a pack mule."

"I'll walk up there, Lieutenant," offered Winsoton.

"You'd have to start now, then," laughed Scott. "No, Winsoton, I'm sorry, but I'm going alone. Who else knows the jungle well enough to post patrols at the proper places on those side trails?"

"Sergeant Baker, sir."

"Good. I'll have him post the patrols on the Paja Road ends and you can post them in from the Paraiso Road. Be at the guard house at ten tonight, ready to move out."

"Yes, sir, but I wish I could go with the lieutenant."

The two men rode back to the Paja Road and on to the post. At the corral, Scott parted from the chief cargador and rode to the headquarters picket line.

"What horses will be on Post Number Six tonight?" he asked of Sergeant Baker.

"Calico, George, and Grey Lady, sir."

"Turn them out, will you? And get me some chain, good heavy chain, in pieces about eighteen inches long. Spare trace chains will be fine, if you have enough. I'll want a lot of them. Oh, yes, and get me a couple of rolls of adhesive tape too."

With a puzzled air, Sergeant Baker produced the needed articles while stable orderlies led out the three horses. Soothing the horses as he worked, Scott bound the lengths of chain to their legs, fastening them in place with the tape so thoroughly that there was no chance of their slipping. When he had finished, each horse was so armored that no blow which could be struck with a machete would injure their legs.

"Be sure that no other horses are ridden on that post tonight," was Scott's injunction to Baker. "I'm pretty sure that an attack will be made, and we don't want to lose another charger."

As he turned to go, his gaze fell on Frog who stood near by, his reins dropped to the ground.

"We may get into close quarters tonight, pony," he said thoughtfully. " Come here and let me put some protection on your legs, too."

He carefully fastened chains on Frog's legs, then left the horse at the corral and made his way on foot to the bachelor quarters, feeling that he had done a good day's work.

Precisely at ten o'clock, the drumming of hoofs outside his quarters told Scott that his orderly had brought up Frog. He rose, buckled on his service pistol, and walked out. In his hand he carried a long and unusually heavy riding crop. Frog whinnied a welcome as his master appeared. Scott bent down and examined the horse's legs carefully, making sure that none of the chains had slipped, or were chafing.

" You ought to rate a rest tonight, Frog," he said as he vaulted into the saddle, " but you aren't going to get it. This is likely to be a wild night, and I want a mount I can trust."

He turned Frog's head toward the guard house. He found a detail of twenty-five picked men waiting for him, Winsoton and Baker at their head.

" All non-commissioned officers come into the guard house, please," he said.

When the non-coms had dismounted and joined him, Scott spread out on a table his map, with every trail through the jungle marked on it. Across the map ran a red line, the newly-cut trail he and Winsoton had found that morning.

"Now, pay close attention," he said. The non-commissioned officers bent over the map while Scott briefly but clearly outlined his plan. "Does everyone understand?" he asked when he had finished.

There was a chorus of assent.

"Very well. Baker and Winsoton, pick your details and move out. Corporal Evans, you'll be in charge of the six men who will be hidden along the back road. Now, everybody remember, make plenty of noise, and above all, don't let him double back past you. Drive him on up to where I am waiting for him. In no case kill him. I'll go with you while you post your men, Evans."

Scott stationed the corporal and his six men in good hiding places along the back road, near where the two previous attacks had been made. He gave a few final words of instruction to the sentry who would be riding the post at midnight, then set Frog at a trot along the Paja Road. Three miles from the post he turned into the jungle and picked his way through the thick growth. Two miles from the road he paused. Before him was the open savanna, about five acres in extent, which he had sought. The pass through the hills lay at the lower edge of the opening, and Scott was sure that the madman's trail would lead straight across the savanna.

To be sure, the madman might go through the pass and then keep along the edge of the open space in the shadow of the jungle, but Scott relied on the men from the post pushing him too hard to allow such an artifice. He dismounted and moved up to Frog's head, ready to soothe him by a touch, should he show an inclination to snort or whinny. A glance at his wrist watch showed him that it lacked twenty minutes of midnight.

"If he runs true to form, there ought to be a racket back at the post in a few minutes," he said to himself.

He kept his eye on the watch. With tedious slowness, the minute hand crept around until it marked twelve. Five more minutes passed, and Scott gave a sigh of disappointment. Probably the man had seen something of the elaborate plans made for his reception and had kept away from the post for that night. He dropped his hand and turned toward Frog. The horse gave a sudden start, pricked up his ears, and faced the distant post. On the night air, faint but clear, came the report of a pistol. There was an instant of silence, then the pistol barked again and again. It stopped, then came an irregular volley.

“ The detail under Evans has reached the sentry,” cried Scott, hopping with excitement. “ Now, if they can just manage to keep him coming this way! ”

He listened intently, but the post was too distant for him to hear the noise of the pursuit. Once in a while a single shot rang out, telling him that the detail was following the man. The sound was approaching along the trail which Scott had marked in red on his map.

For five minutes there was silence, then from a point to the right of the trail, three shots rang out.

“ That’s Winsoton’s men! ” exclaimed Scott.

He listened intently and could hear, faint and distant, the sound of shouts. Evidently the man had striven to break out to the Paraiso Road and had encountered one of the patrols placed to intercept him.

Presently more shots came from the main trail, but whether the pursuers from the post had sighted their quarry, or were firing at random, Scott could not tell.

The sounds of pursuit came closer. It was less than a mile away now, and Scott could hear faint shouts as the soldiers forced their way forward. He mounted Frog and gathered his reins in readiness. In his immediate vicinity was silence, absolute silence.

Suddenly Frog gave a start, perked his ears inquiringly. Scott laid a cautioning hand on the horse's neck, watched the jungle at the edge of the savanna with straining eyes. Again Frog gave a start. This time Scott jumped too. Through the still air came the sound of a trodden stick crackling underfoot. The sound was at the very edge of the open space. Scott strained his eyes afresh. Suddenly he gave a grunt of satisfaction. A dark figure emerged from the jungle and started across the savanna at an easy run. Scott's plans had been accurately laid.

Scott let the figure get almost to the middle of the savanna before he betrayed his presence by sound or motion. When he judged that the man was the maximum distance from the sheltering gloom of the jungle, he touched Frog with his spur. The horse shot out like an arrow, racing across the grass-clad savanna toward the dark figure which stood out plainly in the flooding light of the moon. Scott altered the horse's direction slightly so as to cut the man off from the upper edge of the savanna. If he could not capture him, at least he would be able to drive him back into the arms of the pursuing patrol.

At the first sound of Frog's hoofs, the figure stopped, frozen into immobility. He faced the oncoming horse and rider, a bright steel blade gleaming in the moonlight in his upraised hand. From his lips came a wailing screech, a sound that made Scott shudder involuntarily. Still waving the machete, the man moved slowly forward to meet the approaching horseman.

Scott touched Frog with his spur, swung the horse wide. He vaulted from the saddle, dropping Frog's reins to the ground. The man was coming forward at a trot now, the gleaming machete swinging in a wide curve about his head.

" Drop that machete! " Scott ordered sharply.

The man hesitated for an instant at the sound of Scott's voice, then came on again with a rush. Another wild howl came from his foam-flecked lips. Straight toward Scott he charged. The lieutenant raised his heavy crop, then sprang lightly to one side. The man made no attempt to follow his movements, but raced straight on, the machete still whirling about his head. Scott watched him as he rushed past. Suddenly he realized the object of the man's attack. He was heading straight for Frog.

Scott gave a shout and leaped after him. He caught him by the shoulder, whirled him about. The lunatic looked at him with wildly rolling eyes, then swung his machete up for a blow. Scott had just time to throw up his heavy riding crop before the blow fell. The heavy blade tore straight through the steel rod which was in the center of the crop. Luckily for Scott, the crop turned the blade so that the machete struck his head with the flat side instead of the edge. The blow caught him full on the forehead, hurled him half-stunned to the ground. Blood spurted from a cut on his forehead.

As he fell, Scott cast aside the two ends of the now useless crop and fumbled instinctively for his pistol. His searching fingers found it. He whipped it from its holster, dashed the blood from his eyes with his other hand. He raised the weapon, but there was no madman before him. The maniac had paid no attention to the officer, once he had felled him, but had charged on toward the horse.

Scott saw the machete swing through the air. There was a clash of steel on steel. A shower of sparks flew as the machete met the chains which he had fastened on Frog's legs. The madman drew back for an instant, then raised his machete for another blow.

A shrill scream of rage came from Frog's throat. The chains had protected him from injury, but the keen blade had bitten through the skin of his leg and made a slight wound in his flesh. Already frightened by the smell of raw blood which came from Scott's wounded head, it took only the blow and the sharp pain it caused to rouse the demon which slept in Frog's nature, the demon which had made him the terror of the corral until Scott's gentleness and horsemanship had lulled it to rest. As the madman swung up his machete for another blow, Frog rose on his hind legs and made a lunge, his forefeet lashing out in vicious blows.

The threatening machete fell, but again a shower of sparks flew into the air. Before the blow could be repeated there was another scream, this time the cry of a man in mortal terror. Through it cut the dull thud of a blow. The scream died in mid-note, and the man went down like a bullet-riddled lion. With flashing hoofs, Frog charged the prostrate figure.

" FROG! "

Scott's voice rang out in sharp command. The horse hesitated an instant, then swerved to one side. He paused for only a fraction of a second before renewing the attack, but that was enough. Scott leaped forward and caught him by the bridle, jerked his head to one side.

" Quiet down, pony," Scott said as he stroked the velvet lips, now wrinkled back to expose vicious teeth.

Under Scott's soothing touch the horse relaxed and buried his nose in his master's shirt. Scott left him and bent over the prostrate figure, a flashlight in his hand. He rose with a sigh of relief.

"Just stunned, and his head laid open," he said as he reached for a first-aid packet. "He'll be on his feet again by the time Evans and his men get here."

"Your dispositions seem to have been admirably made, Mr. Scott," said Colonel Bennitt. "The only thing that I don't understand is why you met him alone. Why didn't you take a half-dozen men with you, instead of spreading your entire detail out through the jungle?"

"I was afraid that a large party would be seen or heard, sir," Scott answered. "It's mighty hard to find a half-dozen, or even two horses, whom you can trust not to snort or stamp when they get a strange scent. I knew I could trust Frog. If that chap had been alarmed, he wouldn't have crossed the savanna where I caught him, but would have kept in the jungle and gone off some other way. The ground is hard in every direction above the pass, sir. If he had turned off, we might never have caught him without bloodhounds, sir."

"That's true. I'm glad it came out so well. I'm especially gratified that you were able to capture him without injuring him. I'd hate to see a poor crazy devil like that killed, and I was afraid that you couldn't capture him any other way."

"You can thank Frog for that, sir," answered Scott. "I was just debating whether to shoot the chap or let him go when Frog took a hand in the shindy and settled the matter. And now, sir," he went on with a glance at his wrist watch, "if you'll excuse me, I've got to go down to the commissary and arrange to have the finest porterhouse steak in Panama City sent out to the post." He stole a glance at Colonel Bennitt's puzzled face, then laughed. "You see, Colonel," he said, "a good deal of the credit for last night belongs to Sergeant Winsoton. He was the man who knew the jungle well enough to place the patrols who bottled that chap up and drove him to me. He seems to be a little off chicken lately, so I promised him a first-class beefsteak dinner for his help."

"Fair enough," chuckled the colonel. "And while you're getting that steak, Mr. Scott, just tell them to charge it to my account. They're as much my horses as they are yours, you know."

X

A SENSE OF HUMOR

"SAY, Scotty, I want to talk to you."

Lieutenant Scott sprang to his feet as Captain Kildare entered his room in the bachelor quarters.

"Come in, Captain," he said. "Here, have a chair. Sit down and spill your troubles. What's worrying you?"

"Mrs. Buford."

Scott started to laugh, then managed to assume a shocked expression.

"Really, Captain, I'm surprised," he said gravely. "You don't mean to tell me that you are seriously interested in her, do you? She's married, you know, and besides, for all her kittenish ways, I think she's several years older than you are."

Kildare flung a pillow at Scott's head.

"Shut up, will you?" he said. "She's old enough to be my mother, and you know it. What I'm interested in about her is the way she's playing hob with the polo string."

Scott's assumed seriousness became real.

"She isn't doing them any good," he admitted. "She took Courtesy out yesterday, and she taught him more bad habits in two hours than I can rid him of in a week."

"Courtesy isn't the only one. She's hurt some of the poorer trained horses more than she ever could Courtesy. Whoever told her she knew how to ride?"

"Her hubby's aide-de-camp," Scott replied promptly. "That's one of his principal jobs. Have you ever been a general's aide?"

"Never, thank goodness."

"Well, just shine up to Lady Buford a little and you may be one. Take her out riding on old condemned mokes that are perfectly safe, but make her think they are outlaws. Then when you come in, praise her riding to the skies, and tell everyone how she subdued a horse that had every officer in the outfit licked. Don't worry about the rest of us, we won't dare give the game away. We'll just follow your lead. Then, if you spread it on thick enough, you may go back to the States with her and put on an aide's collar ornament, and take her shopping during office hours."

"Will you shut your big mouth?" Kildare roared, hurling another pillow at Scott. "Get serious, or I'll tell her that you're the only rider on the post who would dare go the places on a horse that she does, and suggest that the Old Man detail you as her personal escort for the rest of her visit. Then you can be an aide yourself, and see how you like it."

Scott shook with laughter.

"In such a case we'd have to fight a duel for the honor," he said. "We could fight it out with shotguns at half a mile, the loser to get the job. All right, Captain, I'll be good. What do you want me to do?"

"I don't know, Scotty. Some way or other, we've got to break her of going down to the corral, picking out any horse she likes, and ordering it saddled for her. If we don't, one of two things is going to happen. Either half the horses on the post will be taught bad manners, or else she'll try her kittenish tricks on a real mount some day when he's feeling his oats, and she'll get killed."

"Why don't you speak to the colonel?"

"Would you do it? Go up and ask him to stop a major general's wife who's visiting on the post, from riding anything but ladies' hacks?"

"No-o-o, I wouldn't," Scott admitted. "But there ought to be some way of stopping it."

"That's what I wanted to see you about. No doubt there is some way, but what is it?"

Scott scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I know, Captain," he admitted, "but I'll think the matter over. Maybe I can dope out something."

"I sure hope you can, Scotty. I've thought until my head aches, and short of going up to her and telling her the truth bluntly, I don't see how it can be done."

When Kildare had left, Scott sat for some time in thought. The problem was not an easy one. Mrs. Buford was the wife of one of the highest ranking officers in the United States Army, and one whose will it was not well for a junior officer to cross. Nor was she one who would take a hint. She was a good many years younger than her husband, but she had striven to keep a youth which was fast becoming only a memory, and by her kittenish ways and her violent addiction to sports, to convey the impression that she was nearer thirty than the forty-eight which was her real age.

Chief among the things on which she prided herself was her ability to ride. This belief, carefully fostered by her husband's aides, was so firmly embedded in her mind that she could not conceive of a horse she could not master. Really, she could ride only indifferently, and she had habits in the saddle, and ways of handling her reins that no well-trained, self-respecting cavalry mount would tolerate without a protest.

When she had arrived at Empire for a three month visit, her first action had been to obtain from Colonel Bennitt the run of the corral. This privilege she had used generously. Each day she would go to the corral, select a horse which pleased her eye, and order it saddled. Once or twice Sergeant Baker had tried to protest when she had chosen a pony of the polo string, or some officer's mount, but secure in her husband's rank, she had haughtily overridden him and taken out the horse she chose. And always the horse had come back with his training—and his temper—not at all improved by the experience.

For a wonder she had not been thrown, a tribute to the good manners of the Nineteenth's horses, but Kildare was not alone in his fear that something of the sort would happen.

Scott revolved the matter over in his mind for some time without arriving at any possible solution to the difficulty. At last he picked up his crop and walked down toward the corral.

"Where's Cordwood?" he asked as his swift glance noted that one of his polo mounts was absent from the picket line.

Sergeant Baker made a wry face.

"Mrs. Buford is riding him this afternoon, sir."

"Oh."

Scott's tone spoke volumes. Winsoton, who had been engaged in his usual pastime of arguing with Baker when Scott arrived, started to smile, but a quick look from the lieutenant froze his face into immobility.

"Did you tell her that Cordwood was one of my polo string?" Scott asked.

"No, sir. I told her that when she took Courtesy yesterday, and I didn't get anywhere. So I didn't risk another dressing-down."

"I see. Well, I suppose there was nothing you could do, Baker, but I'm not pleased."

"Neither am I, sir, and nothing would suit me better than to have the lieutenant give me orders that none of his horses are to go out, except on his written order."

"I can hardly do that, Sergeant, in view of

Colonel Bennitt's orders that she is to be allowed to use any horse she selects. However, I wish there were some way of stopping it."

Winsoton edged closer.

"If the lieutenant would only let me handle the affair," he suggested with an insinuating smile, "I might be able to figure out something. The lieutenant may remember that when Major Craven took Frog, I managed to persuade him not to keep him, sir."

Scott laughed, then became suddenly stern.

"Nothing of the sort, Winsoton," he said. "Both Captain Kildare and I would give a good deal to stop it, but you keep your hands off. We don't want the woman hurt, and I don't trust any plans of your contriving. Keep your hands out of it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. I wouldn't do anything for the world, sir."

Winsoton's face was a picture of injured innocence. Scott repressed a desire to laugh, and turned abruptly on his heel.

"I'll dope out something," he said as he walked away. He had gone only a few steps when Baker called to him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but will the lieutenant ride Frog to drill in the morning?"

“ No, I’m going to use Spider.”

“ Very well, sir, I’ll send him up.”

Scott walked on out of the corral. Baker turned to Winsoton in disgust.

“ Why didn’t you keep your fat mouth shut? ” he demanded. “ We could have pulled it off if you hadn’t talked too much. Now we can’t.”

A cherubic smile spread over Winsoton’s face.

“ Pete,” he said, “ every day you live you get dumber, if possible. The lieutenant’s orders were addressed solely to me, and he only said for me to keep my hands out of it. He said nothing about any ideas that I might put into the mush you think is a brain.”

Baker’s leathery face split in a momentary grin.

“ All right, Guard-house Lawyer,” he said. “ If you want to take a chance on telling it to a court-martial, go ahead and spill your plan. What is it? ”

“ My plan? ” Winsoton’s face took on an aggrieved expression. “ Why, I have no plan. How could you suspect me of such a thing? You do me a real injustice. It just struck me as plain providential that the lieutenant isn’t going to ride Frog to drill tomorrow.”

“ Still, I don’t see it. You aren’t planning to offer her Frog as a nice, dependable, ladies’ mount, are you? ”

" Oh, no; no, indeed. I wouldn't think of such a thing. It just occurred to me that Frog might like a little exercise on the hurdles this afternoon, and you might take him out and give it to him. Mrs. Buford rode out the Paja Road, and she'll be coming in soon, right past the jumping field. She might enjoy watching a real jumper do his stuff."

" If she ever got on Frog, he'd kill her."

" No, he wouldn't. He's too much of a gentleman, and besides he has a sense of humor. Remember that little Elsie rides him."

" Yes, but she knows how to sit a horse, and she doesn't joggle the reins and chirp to him. Also, she doesn't think she knows all about horses, and she's willing to let Frog use his judgment."

" Well, anyway, if she demands Frog, you can't refuse her, can you? "

" Of course not, but I don't like the idea of deliberately calling him to her attention. It's too much like murder."

" All right, suit yourself, boy. I'm going to take a nap."

Winsoton strolled off toward the quartermaster corral, leaving Baker wrapped in thought. Ten minutes later he heard the sound of hoofs. He ran to the end of the corral with a speed surprising in one of his bulk, and smiled quietly to himself as he saw Frog, with Baker up on a jumping saddle, heading toward the jumping field.

" Pete can get an idea sometimes," he said to himself, " if you club him over the head with it hard enough."

Winsoton's calculations had been accurate. Baker had not put Frog over a dozen hurdles when Mrs. Buford appeared, riding Cordwood, with an orderly trotting behind her. She reined in her mount and watched Frog as he cleared hurdle after hurdle lightly as a bird.

" Who is that? " she asked her orderly.

" That's Sergeant Baker, ma'am."

" Ride over and tell him to come here. I want to see that horse."

The orderly touched his mount with a spur and sped away. A few moments later Sergeant Baker reined in Frog before the general's wife.

" What horse is that, Sergeant? " she asked.

" Frog, one of Lieutenant Scott's polo string, ma'am."

" I haven't seen him before. Where do you keep him? "

" On the polo string picket line, ma'am."

" He looks like a pretty good horse. Is he fast? "

" The fastest horse in the regiment, ma'am."

" I'll ride him tomorrow."

Sergeant Baker looked doubtful.

" What's the matter? " Mrs. Buford demanded sharply.

" Frog's a pretty mean horse, ma'am, and hard to handle."

" That's the kind I like. Have him saddled at nine tomorrow morning. I'll come to the corral and get him."

" Yes, ma'am."

The next morning at nine, Mrs. Buford appeared. Baker cast a look at her heels, and whistled in dismay. She was wearing a pair of sharp-rowelled training spurs.

" You aren't going to use those on Frog, are you, ma'am? " he asked quickly.

" Certainly," she answered. " You told me he was hard to manage, so I brought training spurs and a quirt. I know how to handle bad horses."

" But ——"

" That will do, Sergeant. Help me to mount."

" Yes, ma'am."

Baker stepped forward and cupped his hands for her foot. She swung into Frog's saddle, and Baker stepped back and vaulted quickly into the saddle of his own mount, ready for any eventualities.

Mrs. Buford gathered her reins, raised them with a sharp jerk and shook them, chirping sharply to the horse as she did so. Frog threw up his head in astonishment. His rider spoke sharply to him, then touched him with the end of the quirt she was carrying. Frog hesitated a moment, then walked forward with the slow, decorous gait he was accustomed to use with Elsie Rembrandt. Baker followed, his eyes glued on Frog. Mrs. Buford shook the reins again and chirped sharply. Frog once more threw up his head in surprise, but he did not alter his gait.

" I thought you said this horse was spirited, Sergeant? " Mrs. Buford asked scornfully.

" He is, ma'am."

" Well, I wish he'd show some spirit. Here, you, get up! "

She smote Frog sharply on the flank with her quirt. He gave a sudden start, but his gait did not change.

" Get up! Don't walk all day."

Again she brought the lash of her quirt down and dug her sharp-rowelled spurs into his tender flanks. Frog stopped dead, then sank almost imperceptibly toward the ground.

" FROG! "

Sergeant Baker's voice rang out in anguished pleading. He knew only too well what that slight crouch portended, and he had a vision of Frog leap-ing straight out from under his rider, leaving her to fall heavily to the macadam road.

Frog heard Baker's voice, and the tenseness of his muscles relaxed. Even yet all might have been well, had not Mrs. Buford, angered at his stopping, taken this for the moment to apply both spurs and quirt with renewed vigor.

Frog gave a scream of rage and bounded forward. In one bound he was going at full charge, his head stretched far out in front and his slim legs flying over the ground. Baker clapped the spurs to his mount and endeavored vainly to catch the runaway, although he knew from the start that the task was a hopeless one.

Mrs. Buford sawed vigorously on her reins, shouting, " Whoa "; at first in tones of anger, then of fear, and as her sawing on Frog's bit had no effect, with almost an hysterical note in her voice. The horse crouched low to the road and tore out toward Las Cascadas, Baker riding his best, a hundred yards in the rear.

Gradually Frog's speed lessened, and Baker began to gain on him. Frog was over his first burst of anger, and was settling down to a steady, hard run. Baker rammed home his spurs and strove his best to overtake him. On his back, Mrs. Buford sawed with fresh vigor, but Frog had the bit gripped firmly in his teeth, and her feeble strength was as nothing to his.

Slowly Baker came alongside. He was just reaching out to grasp the runaway's bridle when Frog decided that the time had come for another burst of speed. In a minute Baker's mount was two lengths behind and losing ground at every stride.

Twice more during the three mile ride to Las Cascadas, Frog slowed down until Baker nearly overtook him, only to start off with fresh speed when the sergeant strove to grasp his bridle.

They swung round a curve and a mounted sentry appeared in the road before them. Baker gave a shout. The sentry, comprehending the situation, swung his horse across the road to block it, but Frog was not yet ready to stop. He turned sharply to the left onto an intersecting road. Baker reined in his horse and quickly studied the terrain.

"He'll double back to the main road," he decided. "I'll head him off."

He swung his mount about and started back toward Empire. He had gone but a few hundred yards when he was aware that Frog was on a converging road, racing with him for the intersection.

Baker dug in his spurs and encouraged his horse by every trick he knew, but Frog forged steadily ahead. When the intersection of the two roads was reached, he was a good three lengths ahead of Baker, and as he raced on toward Empire, he increased his lead.

Mrs. Buford had kept her grip on the reins, but from the way she was swaying in the saddle, Baker expected to see her fall at any moment. She had long ago lost all breath for crying out, and was holding on desperately, her hair flying in the wind.

Again Frog slowed down until Baker's laboring mount seemed about to overtake him, then increased his speed. This time, however, Frog did not open a gap between the two horses. He merely held his half-length lead. No matter how much Baker yelled at him, or how he spurred his mount, Frog kept his even lead.

" If he runs under a picket line, he'll kill her," Baker groaned to himself. " All I can do is to pick up the pieces. Oh, why did I listen to that fat fool? "

The corral at Empire came into view. Frog let out an extra notch of speed and left Baker's mount behind. Ahead of him in the corral, Baker could see men running to head Frog off. But there was no need. The horse went at full speed almost to the picket line, then swerved off and slackened his gait, coming to a halt at the door of the corral office. Mrs.

Buford swayed in the saddle for a moment, then went suddenly limp and tumbled off to the ground.

Baker vaulted from his saddle and bent over her.

"Water! Quick!" he shouted.

A stable police ran up with a bucket, but Mrs. Buford's eyes opened. She gazed vacantly around, and then memory returned. She began to laugh. Quickly the laugh rose in key until shriek after shriek came in wild hysteria from her lips.

"She'll live, Pete," came a quiet voice at Baker's elbow. He whirled around to find Winsoton looking on with amusement written large on his face. "She'll live," he repeated. "They always do when they start to holler and carry on like that. Come on, we'll carry her up to the hospital and let Old Sawbones give her a shot in the arm. I'll bet ten dinners that she's learned something about horses, though."

An hour later Scott faced Baker and Winsoton in the corral. His face was stern and forbidding.

"Tell me what happened," he demanded.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Buford saw me riding Frog over the hurdles yesterday, and she ordered me to give him to her today. He ran away with her. That's all."

"He ran away? What started him? Did he have a thorn under his saddle?"

" Absolutely not, sir," said Baker emphatically. " I saddled him myself, and unsaddled him. His saddling was okay. It was the way she hit him with a quirt and jammed rowelled spurs into him that started him off. Come and take a look at his flanks."

Scott's face hardened as he saw the scars made by the spurs.

" No wonder he policed her," he muttered.

" He didn't police her, sir. Frog never policed a woman. He just stopped and she slid off in a faint. I jumped down to attend to her. I looked at Frog and he was standing there looking at her with a grin on his face. When he caught my eye, I'll swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high that he winked at me. He has a sense of humor, that horse has, and he was just having fun with her."

Scott's shoulders shook with suppressed mirth, but he managed to retain his stern expression.

" Well, anyway, she wasn't hurt," he said.

" Only in her self-esteem, sir," Baker replied. " That ride did one thing, sir. I'll bet a month's pay she doesn't ride another horse I warn her not to."

" If you're right, I can overlook a lot. Winsoton, just what part did you have in this outrage? "

" Me, sir? " Winsoton's fat face was the picture of injured innocence. " Why, I kept my hands out of it, just like the lieutenant ordered me to."

"I didn't ask that. I asked what your part in this plan was."

Winsoton gave a slow smile.

"Well, I really hadn't anything to do with it, sir. I just suggested to Baker yesterday afternoon, after I found the lieutenant wasn't going to ride Frog this morning, that he take him out on the jumping field for exercise, just when she was coming by. I had no idea she would want to ride him, sir. But Baker's right about one thing, Lieutenant. She isn't going to ride another one of our polo ponies soon, if ever."

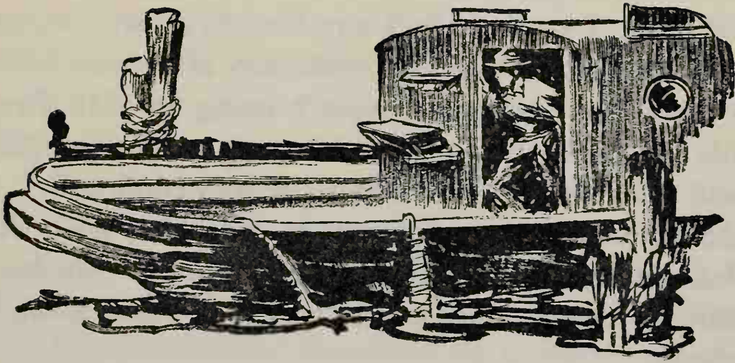
Scott's shoulders began to shake again, and he turned away to hide his face. At last he controlled himself and turned back.

"Anyway, no harm's done," he said. "Baker, when are you and Winsoton going to Panama again?"

"Probably next Saturday night, sir."

"All right, when you get there, you go into the American House and order yourselves the two best dinners you can get. After you have eaten them, tell them to charge the bill to Captain Kildare. I'll see that he pays it."

"Yes, sir," they chorused as Scott walked hastily away.



XI

DISPATCHES

"MR. SCOTT, can you and Frog make it through to Pedro Miguel by midnight?"

Lieutenant Scott shook the water from his dripping campaign hat before replying. He glanced at the clock in Colonel Bennitt's office and thought rapidly. Pedro Miguel was only eight miles away, and the clock said that he had over three hours in which to cover the distance. On the other hand, a forty-mile gale was howling across Empire, driving before it torrents of rain. It was the worst storm which the Canal Zone had experienced in years Scott shuddered involuntarily at the thought of an eight mile ride into the teeth of that driving wind, then straightened his shoulders.

" We'll try, sir."

Colonel Bennitt looked appraisingly at Scott's trim, well-knit figure, then gazed into his clear blue eyes with almost an apologetic expression.

" February seems to me to be a rotten time to hold maneuvers in Panama," he said, " but I suppose the powers that be know best. We had to accommodate our movements to the Navy, you know. At any rate, our telephone line to Pedro Miguel went out an hour ago, and we have no way to get our daily activity report through to General Kingdon at Quarry Heights except by courier. If you can get to Pedro Miguel, you can put it on the telegraph there. The lines on the other side of the canal are buried in conduits, so they'll be operating. You'll have to ride to Pedro Miguel and cross the locks. The bridge at Paraiso is being kept open continually during the maneuvers."

" We'll get through, sir," Scott said.

" You'll go by the Arrijan trail, I suppose? "

" No, sir, straight along the Pedro Miguel road. The trail will be impassable in this weather. The water will be shoulder deep on it in places."

"But you can't make it along the road, Scott," protested the colonel. "The department engineer condemned that road months ago, when the cracks first opened along the site of the old Cucaracha slide. They have tried to rebuild it, but the storms have opened it up until it may go at any minute now. If the road were passable, I'd send a car."

"We can make it, sir. I won't keep to the road. When I get to the slide, I'll turn off into the jungle and go around the dangerous stretch. It can be done, sir."

Colonel Bennitt looked grave.

"I wouldn't send you, Scott," he said, "if it weren't vitally important. We are supposed to be in a war status, and the chances that we would take if it were a case of actual war, we must take now. You know the recent attitude of Congress toward the Cavalry. In view of the lessons of the World War, many people think that the arm is obsolete and should be abolished, or our men mounted on motorcycles instead of horses. I don't agree with them. I know that a horse can go places where no machine can. This ride may be a test case. If those dispatches don't get through, the enemies of the mounted service will jump on it and use it as proof that the horse is no good. Not only the future of the Nineteenth, but the future of the whole Cavalry may rest on your success. Get through, if it is humanly possible."

Scott flushed beneath his tropic tan. In common with all cavalry officers he had read, and resented, the attacks made on the mounted service, and had felt the pinch of lessened appropriations. He stiffened his shoulders.

"Frog and I will get through, sir," he said shortly.

"If you say you will, I know that it's as good as done," said Colonel Bennitt. "One more thing. After the activity report goes on the wire, ride on to Quarry Heights and deliver this confidential report into General Kingdon's hands. Give it to no one else, not even his chief of staff. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." Scott took the dispatches, saluted, and left the colonel's office.

Frog, his reins dropped to the ground, was waiting in front of the headquarters building. His dark bay coat was so soaked with the driving rain that its color merged almost imperceptibly into the black on his hoofs. His tail and mane hung in bedraggled strings, dripping steady streams of water. As Scott walked up, the horse raised his dripping head and nuzzled his master softly. Scott stroked his neck and rubbed his velvet muzzle.

"I expect you'd like to go to bed, pony," he said, "but you and I are going to have a wild ride tonight. We've got to make it through to Peter Mike before midnight, though the Heavens fall. No bunch of General Staff eggs are going to say that the Cavalry is no good and can't get reports through on time; not if we have anything to say about it. Come on, boy, we'll go by the quarters and pick up a flashlight. It may be useful."

He vaulted lightly onto Frog's back and gathered the reins. The beautifully trained horse moved off toward the bachelor quarters, and came to a standstill as Scott vaulted off his back. The lieutenant dropped Frog's reins to the ground, confident that the horse would be waiting when he returned, no matter what happened in the meantime. His confidence was justified, for Frog's only movement was to turn his back to the storm. Scott emerged with a flashlight in his hand which he thrust into the off saddlebag.

"Let's go, Frog," he said as he vaulted into the saddle.

Frog moved off through the post toward the Pedro Miguel road. Once clear of the post, Scott put him into a trot, that easy, distance-eating trot which Frog could maintain for hours at a time. Even in the face of the howling wind which drove the rain drops against his face like bullets, he moved steadily forward, making no attempt to swerve in a direction which would make the going easier. Scott pulled his campaign hat low on his forehead and bent forward in his saddle, shielding his face as well as he could from the stinging rain.

The road led past Camp Gaillard, deserted now except for a care-taking detachment while its Infantry garrison was living in tents at Gatun, then wound on toward Pedro Miguel. For a mile and a half it led on, then made a sharp turn to the right. As Frog rounded the curve, he slowed down to a walk, then suddenly stopped dead in his tracks.

"Cucaracha," said Scott. "I'll take a look at that road."

He vaulted from Frog's back, turned the horse so that his back would be to the storm, then dropped the reins. From the saddlebag, he extracted his light. He made his way cautiously forward on foot, the light piercing a shadowy path through the driving rain.

Twenty yards from the point where Frog had stopped, a crack eighteen inches wide opened across the road. Scott examined it closely with his light. The rays would not reach to the bottom of the crevice.

"It's opened fully six inches since the day before yesterday," Scott said to himself. "That means that the whole business is likely to slide into the canal very soon. This rain has softened things up a good deal. However, we can make it around this stretch all right. It's only three or four hundred yards long."

He returned to Frog, mounted, and turned the horse's head into the jungle. Frog leaped the little ditch on the side of the road and forced his way through the thick underbrush, interlaced with twining lianas which, at times, almost barred the way. He pushed ahead for a hundred yards, then suddenly paused and snorted in alarm.

"Go on, Frog," said Scott soothingly. "Nothing's going to bite you."

The horse made a few hesitating steps forward, stepping gingerly as though he feared to trust his weight on the ground. Suddenly there was a nasty, sucking sound. The hard surface of the ground had given way. Frog's front legs plunged knee-deep into the mire. In an instant Scott had vaulted to the ground.

With a snort of something akin to fear, Frog reared. He drew his forelegs partly out of the mud, when the sucking sound came again. His hind legs crashed through the hard surface. The whole ground quaked. Scott tried to spring back, but at the first effort he was mired up to his knees.

He realized his peril with sickening suddenness. Once the hard surface crust was broken, there was no known bottom to the Cucaracha mud. The soft, sticky substance had been one of the greatest handicaps the canal builders had had to face. Even yet, dredges were kept in this stretch of the Culebra Cut, sucking up the mud which continually oozed up from the bottom of the canal under the pressure of the neighboring hills.

He tried to lift one leg, but that only forced the other one deeper. As he moved, Frog began to struggle.

" Steady, boy! " Scott cried.

At the sound of his voice, the horse ceased his struggles and stood motionless. Scott caught at the saddle, managed to get the light from his saddlebags. It cut a dim path through the rain-lashed darkness. A few feet to the right, Scott made out a stretch of harder ground which ran toward the road. If they could only reach that! They were not sinking while they did not struggle. That meant that there was still hope.

He reached forward until he could grip Frog's reins, and looped them over his arm. By holding to the saddle, he managed to draw his legs free from the sucking mud. He braced himself for an effort.

"Now!" he ejaculated to himself. To the horse he cried: "Frog, come here! Up, boy, up!"

Obedient to his master's voice, Frog reared. His hind legs sank deeper, but he managed to free his forelegs from the mud. Scott, treading as lightly as he could, made his way toward the hard stretch. Again he called sharply, almost brutally, to the horse, pulling with all his strength on the reins. Foot by foot, the horse fought his way forward, Scott pulling at his reins and encouraging him by his voice. At last his forefeet landed on the edge of the hard ground. In another instant he had drawn himself free from the sucking mud, and stood trembling beside his master.

"Narrow squeak, wasn't it, old fellow?" said Scott as he stroked the trembling horse. "Come on, let's get back to the road."

The hard surface held until they reached the road again. Scott soothed the still trembling horse.

"No getting around that way, Frog," he said, "and the Arrijan trail would be worse. I'll have a look at that road."

Dropping Frog's reins to the ground, he advanced to the crack across the road. He examined it critically, then leaped across it and went on. Three hundred yards further he found another crack, even wider than the first. Other ugly cracks ran lengthwise of the road, on the jungle side.

" I believe we can make it," Scott said slowly to himself. The thought of Colonel Bennitt's expression when he had said: " If you say you will, I know it's as good as done," came to him. He squared his shoulders resolutely. " We've got to make it," he said grimly.

He leaped back over the crack and made his way to Frog's side. The rain had died down somewhat, and the wind no longer blew with such terrific force. He vaulted onto the horse's back.

" This is going to be a tough drill, pony," he said, " but we've got to go through with it. Let's go! "

At the touch of the spur, Frog moved slowly forward to the very edge of the crack. Scott pressed his knees together and gathered the reins for a jump. Frog crouched, then suddenly whirled and faced back toward the post.

" That won't do, Frog," said Scott sternly. " We're going on. Quit stalling! "

He turned Frog, pressed his knees together again, leaning forward and stroking the horse's neck.

" Come on, old fellow," he said quietly, yet with a ring of unmistakeable authority in his voice. *" Hup!"*

He touched Frog with his spur. The horse crouched low, then shot forward like an uncoiling spring, clearing twenty feet in one huge bound. It was the trick which had won him his name, one which was guaranteed to unseat an unskilled rider. Scott was ready for it and he merely settled deeper into his saddle as the horse shot through the air. Frog landed running.

Like a frightened rabbit, the horse scuttled along the road. Scott crouched low in his saddle, hoping that the road would hold. The open cracks he had seen flashed past. Frog sprang from side to side like a cat, avoiding the holes which would have spelled his ruin. The end of the stretch was almost reached. Scott breathed more freely. Suddenly a sickening sensation gripped the pit of his stomach. Above the howling of the wind came a low, ominous growl. Frog heard it and gave a mighty leap toward safety, but his hoofs struck on a sheer, clay bank. The road, dislodged by the weight of the galloping horse and rider, had broken loose, and was sliding, slowly, but with sickening certainty, toward the canal, two hundred feet below.

Frog sprang desperately at the almost sheer bank before him, strove to climb it, but his hoofs could gain no footing on the slippery clay. Scott leaned forward on his saddle, and encouraged the horse by every trick he knew, but still the road slipped on down toward the water. The slide was crumbling now. At any moment it might break up into a formless mass of earth, which would plunge down with them into the canal.

" We can't climb it, pony," Scott cried. " Steady, boy, there's only one thing to do."

With spur and reins he turned his mount's head toward the canal. The road was slipping faster now. If they faced the water, there was a chance that they would be able to jump to comparative safety. Scott freed his feet from the stirrups, ready for what might come.

With a dull, grinding sound, the road broke up. Scott vaulted free from the saddle. In a moment he was engulfed in a mass of mud and rock, and borne downward with increasing velocity. There was a breath-taking flight through the air, and water closed above his head.

Scott kicked vigorously. Fortunately, the mass of mud and rock was not tenacious. A few swift kicks freed his legs from it. He swam upward with all his strength. In a few moments his head rose above the water of the canal. His first thought was for his horse.

" Frog! " he cried. " Where are you, old fellow? "

A splashing a few feet away answered him. Scott swam toward the sound. A dark, moving object rose before him. His hand struck a velvet muzzle. Frog had been thrown clear and was swimming valiantly toward shore.

"Well, pony, this is a ride," gasped Scott as he caught the pommel of his saddle. He worked his way forward and guided the horse's head toward shore. Presently it loomed before them. Scott's heart sank. The falling road had not filled the forty-foot deep canal, and a sheer cut bank rose ten feet above the surface of the water. The shore was there, but it might as well have been miles away for all the good it did them.

Scott caught at a root which protruded from the bank, and held himself up. He thought rapidly. Even at high water when Gatun Lake was pouring over every gate of the spillway, the bank was from five to twenty-five feet above the water for the entire length of the Culebra Cut. There was no chance of Frog scaling it, and the idea of abandoning his horse never entered Scott's head.

"It looks like we were stuck here, Frog," he said. "Lucky that the water's warm, and that the alligators don't come this far up the cut. But the question is, how are we to get out?"

He drew himself as far out of the water as he could, and looked out over the canal. Low on the water he could detect through the light mist of rain which was still falling, low, winking lights. He puzzled at them for a moment, then revelation came.

"The dredges!" he cried. "If we can swim out to them, they can probably haul us on board."

Clinging with one hand to Frog's mane, he reached under water, fumbled with the saddle cinch. It was water-soaked, and he could not unfasten it. He reached into his pocket and found his knife. He opened it with his teeth, and again attacked the cinch. In a moment the saddle and water-soaked blanket slipped off into the canal.

He reached down into the water again and slit open the leather of his riding boots. He dropped them into the water and struggled out of his flannel shirt. His breeches, which were almost impossible to remove, and his campaign hat in which he carried the all-important dispatches, he kept. Thus lightened, he looped Frog's reins over his arm.

"Come on, pony," he said. "We've got a long swim before us."

Frog followed him obediently as he struck out for the distant lights. The dredges were farther than Scott had thought. But for the support which Frog gave him, he would have sunk long before the dark hulk of the nearest dredge loomed before him.

"On board, there!" he gasped.

There was a stir on board, and a lantern flashed across the water.

" What is it? " came a voice. " Where are you? "

" In the water," gasped Scott.

The lantern was lowered over the side. There was a cry of amazement and then the thud of feet as other men came running from the dredge cabin. A rope struck Scott in the face. He grasped it desperately.

" Ready? " asked a voice.

" Not yet. Give me more rope."

The rope was played out. Scott lowered it into the water. He set his teeth, allowed himself to sink below the surface. Frog's churning hoofs were a source of danger, but he passed under the horse's barrel with the rope in his teeth, and came again to the surface. He looped the end around the main part of the rope and knotted it securely.

" Now haul gently," he cried.

The rope went taut, lifting Frog a few inches in the water.

" That's good! " cried Scott. " Hold that rope as it is, and throw me another."

Another rope was thrown and Scott was hauled to the deck.

" My horse is down there on the end of that other rope," he explained. " We've got to haul him on board."

"Your horse? What are you talking about?"

Scott explained briefly. The engineer of the dredge laughed.

"Sure, we can get him up on deck," he said. "Carlos, get a roll of canvas from the storeroom. We'll put a sling under him and hoist him with the crane."

In five minutes Frog was blowing on board the dredge. In the cabin, Scott rubbed himself furiously with a coarse towel.

"How can I get on to Pedro Miguel?" he demanded of the engineer.

"Peter Mike?" cried the engineer in amazement. "What on earth for? Haven't you had enough trouble for one night?"

"I've got to get on," Scott said grimly. "I'm carrying dispatches which must reach the general before midnight."

"You've got an hour and a half," said the engineer, "but you ought to rest and send them on in the morning. You look all in."

"I've got to get on, if I have to go overboard and swim."

"I admire your grit," said the engineer. "Hanged if I won't help you out. About two miles from here, there's a beach we washed out with hydraulic mining last week. I'll send you up there in a boat. There's a path to the top of the hill."

"It's on the railroad track so that I can get a train in?"

"Yes, but the track was washed out near Gamboa this afternoon. No trains are running. You'll have to walk."

Scott looked at his stockinged feet in dismay.

"I'd have a fat chance of walking it," he said. "Is that path up the hill practicable for a horse?"

"If he's got a footing like a mountain goat."

"Frog has. We'll rest him ten minutes, then lower him over. I hope he can swim another two miles."

"He won't have to," said the engineer. "When I see a man with that much gumption, I'll help him out regardless. Give me ten minutes to get up steam, and I'll take the dredge up to within fifty feet of that beach."

He was as good as his word. In thirty minutes, Scott and Frog stood on the low sandy beach with the good wishes of the dredging crew ringing in their ears.

The path was easy to find, and the two started their three-hundred-foot climb to the top. The engineer had spoken truly when he had said that Frog would need the surefootedness of a goat. The path was narrow, steep, and slippery. Scott's flashlight was at the bottom of the canal with his saddle, and he could find his way only by touch. To add to his difficulties, the rain was again coming down in sheets, while the wind, as though rested by the lull, blew with redoubled fury. Half a dozen times either the man or the horse slipped and missed by a hair's breadth a roll to the bottom, which would have spelled the doom of one, or of both. Scott was sobbing from sheer weariness, and Frog's breath was coming in labored gasps when they finally won their way to level ground at the top of the hill. As they reached it and paused to rest, the clang of the dredge's bell sounded faintly through the storm. Scott counted seven strokes.

" Seven bells! " he gasped. " Half past eleven. Only thirty minutes to make four miles. Pony, can we do it? "

He essayed to vault on Frog's back, but his tired muscles were not equal to the effort. Grasping the horse's mane with both hands, he managed to haul himself onto the saddleless back.

" Go on, horse," he said. " We'll make it, or bust."

Frog broke into a trot, then into a slow gallop. Scott could feel the horse's legs trembling. A momentary doubt assailed him. Frog gradually got into his stride, began to cover the ground with machine-like regularity of gait. The rain drove into Scott's face and blinded him. He gripped with his knees, and prayed fervently that there were no holes in the road.

His rider's eagerness quickly communicated itself to Frog. Despite tired legs and shortened breath, he forged valiantly ahead. Scott made no attempt to guide him. The road had been washed out in places and Frog had to slow down, to pick his way with care, but at every chance he broke into his distance-eating trot, or, where the road allowed, into a slow gallop. Scott marvelled at the horse's ability to pick his way through the pitchy darkness in the teeth of the raging storm, a storm which at times almost threatened to tear him from Frog's back. A group of galvanized shacks loomed up by the side of the road.

" Red Tank," gasped Scott. " Only a mile more."

He drummed against Frog's flanks with his heels. The horse made a gallant response, and broke again into a gallop. His breath was coming in short, labored gasps. Scott expected every minute to feel the horse stumble and sink beneath him. At last the lights of Pedro Miguel came into sight. Scott guided his mount to the telegraph office, and tumbled off at the door. A clock on the wall of the office showed him that it was eight minutes to twelve. He pounded on the door.

A man who had been dozing in a chair rose and came forward. He opened the door, started back in surprise as the half-clad, muddy figure tumbled into the room. Scott tore off his hat, flung the wet dispatches on the table.

" Is your wire to Quarry Heights open? " he demanded.

" Sure, it's open. Why? "

" Emergency dispatches for the commanding general," snapped Scott. " Get busy! "

" Say, who do you think you are, hey? This office closes at ten-thirty. I wouldn't send a message through tonight for the governor himself. I'll send it in the morning."

A dangerous glint came into Scott's eye.

" The entire Canal Zone is under military law for the period of the maneuvers, as you know," he said. " That makes me your superior officer. Those are emergency dispatches. I nearly lost my life in bringing them this far. They must go through. Now, please send them with no more delay."

" Say, who are you talking to? " demanded the operator truculently. " I'm boss here and don't you forget it. Get out of this office! "

He advanced toward Scott with hostile intent.

Scott waited until he was in easy range, then launched a well-aimed fist. It landed square on the operator's jaw, and sent him reeling back. He recovered and came forward with a roar of rage, then recoiled suddenly. Scott stood before him with a raised chair.

" I tried to be decent," grated Scott through set teeth, " but if force is the only argument you understand, I'll use it. Get to that key and start sending those dispatches, or by all that's holy, I'll bean you and send them myself."

The cowed operator sank into a chair and opened a switch.

" What's the message . . . sir? " he said in a suddenly deferential tone.

Scott pointed to the wet sheets. The operator opened the first one, studied it a moment and began tapping his key. Scott glanced at the clock. It was three minutes before twelve.

" Now, send another," he said fifteen minutes later when the Quarry Heights operator had acknowledged receipt of the message. " Send a wire to Corozal, and tell them to start a truck and a horse loading ramp out here at once to take my horse into the post."

" Do you want a passenger car for yourself, sir? " asked the operator.

" No, never mind that," said Scott. " I can ride in the truck as far as Corozal and pick up a passenger car there. No need to wake another driver any sooner than I have to. I'm not worried about myself, it's about Frog. I could walk into Corozal, and get there by morning, I think, but he's more tired than I am. He couldn't travel another five miles if he had to, and he's going to get a comfortable stable tonight, if I have to go to war to get it for him. Start pounding that key . . . and tell the truck to hurry."

XII

OLD ENMITIES

“ WHAT horse is that, Sergeant Meyers? ”

The stable sergeant of the department headquarters corral at Corozal looked up and saluted smartly as he recognized the long, spare figure, and the sharp features of the frowning officer who stood before him.

“ I don’t know his name, sir. We sent out a truck about one o’clock this morning and brought him in from Peter Mike, sir, about all in.”

Lieutenant Glover's frown deepened. He switched his leg impatiently with the heavy quirt he carried in place of the conventional riding crop.

" All in, and with half the mud in the Canal Zone plastered on him," he said. " Who rode him into that shape? Is he one of our horses? "

" No, sir," Sergeant Meyers answered. " He came in from Empire carrying dispatches. The officer with him was named Scott."

" Scott? " Glover's face registered surprise and incredulity. He looked closely at the trim lines of the mud-splashed horse who was the subject of his inquiries. He advanced a step nearer. The horse's ears went back flat on his head and he crouched slightly. Glover beat a hasty retreat out of reach of his heels.

" So you don't know that horse, eh? " he said, a cruel smile playing about the corners of his thin lips. " Well, I can tell you who he is. He's the horse who cost Corozal the department polo cup last November."

" Thunder! " cried the sergeant. " Is that Frog? I was in the States on furlough when the championship was played off, but I've sure heard a lot about him since I got back. Hey, a couple of you birds," he called to the stable police detail, " come over here and get busy on this horse right away. I want him groomed up right before Lieutenant Scott gets back."

"Wait!"

At the sound of the lieutenant's sharp command, the hurrying stable police stopped and looked at him expectantly. Glover stood a moment in deep thought, a plan rapidly forming itself in his crafty mind.

"Where is Lieutenant Scott now?" he asked.

"He isn't back yet, sir," said Sergeant Meyers. "He brought Frog here last night, and told me to blanket him and to have him cleaned up this morning, then he got a car and went to Quarry Heights. He said he'd be back here some time this morning, sir."

Glover glanced at his watch. A sly, cruel smile spread itself slowly over his thin face.

"Seven-thirty," he said, half to himself. "Colonel Thayer won't have gone to headquarters yet. I'll go up to his quarters and see him." To the sergeant he gave peremptory orders: "Don't touch that horse until I come back, no matter who orders you to. I want him left just as he is, mud and all. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Glover turned and hastened away. One of the listening stable police grinned at the sergeant.

" What do you reckon Snake-foot is up to now? " he asked. " It's a crime to leave a good horse in that condition."

" You get busy on them other horses," said Sergeant Meyers with asperity. " Questioning what the officer in charge of the corral does ain't one of your duties."

" Aw, go fry yourself an egg," said the stable police in an undertone as he walked away. " All the same," he called back over his shoulder to the sergeant, " I'll bet you a month's pay that Snake-foot's going to pull a fast one of some sort."

Colonel Thayer, Chief of Staff of the Panama Canal Department, was just emerging from his quarters when Glover reached the foot of the steps. The lieutenant saluted with careful precision.

" Could you spare me a few minutes, sir? " he asked. " It's rather important."

Colonel Thayer glanced at the booted and spurred officer. He frowned slightly as his eyes fell on the heavy quirt and long-rowelled spurs.

" I expect so, Glover," he answered. " What is it? "

" Sir, I'd like to talk to you about the plans for the department gymkhana next May."

Colonel Thayer frowned and his voice was brusque as he answered.

"This is hardly the time for that, Glover," he said. "Right now, our entire interest is centered on the maneuvers. After they have ended next week will be time enough to talk about the gymkhana. It's nearly two months off."

"This is a matter which requires immediate action, sir," the lieutenant insisted. "If the colonel will listen to me, I'll show him a way for Quarry Heights to win the steeple-chase."

"The steeple-chase?" Colonel Thayer's amazement was genuine. "Why, I thought that with you riding Grey Dawn, we were certain of that event."

"I'm afraid that Grey Dawn won't have much chance against Frog, Empire's entry, sir."

"Frog? Oh, yes, Scott's polo pony. I saw him in action when the Cavalry won the department cup last fall. He's got abundance of stamina, and he's quick on a turn, but I don't know how he'll shape up in a steeple-chase. He didn't win the event last year, or even place, so far as I can remember."

"He wasn't entered, sir, for they had nobody who could ride him. He was an outlaw for years until I got hold of him when I first came to the Zone last spring and broke him, but he's sure to win this year. He's fast as a streak, and a wonderful jumper. After I broke him, he was my first mount until I was transferred to Quarry Heights and got my present job, sir."

"He was? Then why didn't you bring him with you when you came here? An officer is entitled to take his first mount with him from post to post in this department."

"I wanted to, sir, but Colonel Bennitt wouldn't allow it. He knew Frog's ability as well as I did, and he wanted Empire to win the polo cup, and the steeple-chase, sir. I begged for Frog, but he refused to let him leave Empire."

"Hmmm," muttered Colonel Thayer to himself. "That doesn't sound like Bennitt. He's a sportsman, if there ever was one." He studied the eager face with its too close set eyes which looked up at him. Although fond of horses, thirty years in the Infantry had not thrown him into over-intimate contact with them. He appreciated Glover's unquestioned ability to ride, and basing his opinion on that, he considered him an expert horseman. At the same time, like many other officers, he did not altogether trust him.

"Well," he said, a trifle sharply, "that's all over with. You don't expect him to give up Frog now, do you?"

"Not willingly, sir, but I thought that you might order him transferred over here so that I could have him again, or at least, we could keep him out of the race and let Grey Dawn win."

Colonel Thayer's face grew crimson.

"Mr. Glover," he thundered, "if I knew that Quarry Heights would lose every event for the next ten years, I would not lend myself to such trickery. We'll win honestly, or not at all. Even suggesting such a piece of sharp practise comes close to being conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman. I wish to hear no more of it."

Glover's shifty eyes fell before the wrath which blazed in Colonel Thayer's face. He realized that he had taken the wrong angle of approach and he shifted ground quickly.

"I hadn't thought of that phase of it, sir," he said humbly. "I was just thinking of the horse. He's being ill-treated and ruined where he is, sir, and I thought to spare him that."

"Bennitt allow a horse in his regiment to be ill-treated? Such an accusation would be insulting, if it weren't so silly. That will do, Mr. Glover. I have no more to say to you."

He turned to go, his face a fiery red with anger. White faced and shaken, Glover stood his ground.

"I can prove my statement, sir," he said.

"How?" The question came out like a pistol shot.

" By showing you the horse. He's down at department headquarters corral right now, sir. Scott rode him in last night, then left him and went on to Quarry Heights in a car, because his horse was in such poor condition that he couldn't have made it. That horse is in pitiable condition, Colonel. He's been ridden foot-sore, he's a mass of bruises, and he is positively filthy. He looks like he hadn't been properly groomed for weeks. I'd try a stable sergeant of mine who let a horse get into that shape, sir; yes, and the man who rode him, too. I'm fond of that horse; I rode him for several months, and it breaks me all up to see him abused. That's the real reason why I want him transferred here. I gave the other reason first because I didn't want to be a tale-bearer, but you really ought to see the condition that Empire horses are allowed to get in, sir."

Again Colonel Thayer studied the officer who stood before him. Glover was a good actor, and his voice carried a tone which would have fooled most men into thinking that it was the ring of truth. The colonel's heart warmed slightly, and his anger began to fade. He loved animals, and he could appreciate the feelings which Glover claimed were his.

" If things are as you say . . ." he said uncertainly.

" It will take you only a few moments to go down to the corral, sir, and see for yourself," said Glover eagerly. " I started to have my men give him a real grooming for once, but then I thought that you ought to see the condition he was in."

" I'll go," said the colonel with sudden decision. " If, as you say, he was your first mount when you were transferred, you were entitled to bring him with you. If he isn't being treated right where he is, you may get him even yet. I'll look at him anyway."

He strode off toward the corral, Glover falling into step on his left.

" There's another thing, sir," Glover said eagerly. " Frog used to be a great pet of mine. He thought a lot of me. He was well-broken and well-liked; yet when I came up to him this morning, he laid back his ears and crouched to kick, sir. No horse that's being treated right will act that way, sir."

Colonel Thayer grunted non-committally in reply. Glover went on.

" I wouldn't want to take any man's horse away from him, sir," he said, " if he were treating him right, but I love horses, and I just can't stand to see one abused, especially one I have ridden like I have Frog. Why, the last time I got off him he followed me like a dog. The only way I could get away from him was to go into his stall and then climb out over the manger. He just wouldn't leave me, sir."

Again the non-committal grunt. Glover said no more, but walked on in silence until the corral was reached.

"Sergeant Meyers," he called, "lead out Frog."

Sergeant Meyers untied Frog's halter-shank and led him out toward the exercise paddock. Colonel Thayer gave a sudden exclamation. Frog was plastered with mud from head to foot, the result of his wild scramble up the heights from Culebra Cut the night before. The driving rain through which he had raced had not removed the greasy, tenacious mud, but had merely plastered it on more tightly. His long black tail and mane, ordinarily shining and glossy, hung in bedraggled wisps, heavy with clots of dried mud. He stepped gingerly as though his feet were sore, and there was a slight limp in his near hind leg. Despite his lameness and weariness, Frog held up his head proudly and surveyed the world with the air of a conqueror. Colonel Thayer walked swiftly to his head.

"Good boy," he said, rubbing the mud-streaked muzzle.

Frog reacted instantly to the tone of friendship. He lowered his head with dignity and sniffed at the colonel's lifted hand. Colonel Thayer ran his hand down the muddy flanks, feeling the muscles with a gentle hand. Frog winced as the hand passed over his withers, and again as it reached his flank.

"This horse is one solid mass of bruises!" the colonel said hotly. "Sergeant Meyers, when did he come here?"

"Last night, sir," the sergeant answered. "Lieutenant Scott, he came in with him, sir. He told me to blanket the horse and then groom him this morning. He ought to be here pretty soon, sir."

"I'll speak to Mr. Scott when he arrives," said the colonel sternly. "The idea of riding a horse in that condition from Empire to Corozal. It looks like you were right, Glover. This horse has had a hard time. Does he remember you?"

"He ought to," said Glover with a chuckle. "Many's the long, hard ride we've taken together. Hello, Frog."

He stepped confidently to the horse's head. Frog's ears went back and he bared his teeth, but Glover seized his halter with a strong, masterful grip.

"Steady, Frog," he said.

He drew the horse's head down, rubbed his nose in a friendly manner and patted his cheeks. Slowly Frog's signs of anger died. It had been nearly a year since Scott had ended the reign of brutality under which he had previously lived. Since that time, no man's hand had been raised against him in anger, and Frog no longer felt that every man was his sworn enemy. At the corral at Empire, not a man passed the picket line without a friendly pat and a kind word for him. Even here, in a strange corral, he found friendly voices and gentle hands. His old hatred for Lieutenant Glover almost died. At least, he was willing to allow himself to be petted. He submitted to Glover's caresses with no outward signs of temper, although his air was one of alertness. Glover did not turn his back to the horse as he stepped away.

" He remembers me well enough," he said to Colonel Thayer. " In a week, we'd be just as big pals as we ever were. In fact, it might not take that long. Shall I show you his gaits, sir? "

" What? Ride him with that strained tendon? "

" That's not a strained tendon, sir, it's just a muscle bruise in his leg. It won't hurt him a bit to ride around the exercise paddock. In fact, it'll warm him up and do him good. I'll start him off very easily." He turned to Sergeant Meyers. " Have his back cleaned off and put my saddle on him. What kind of a bridle did he wear? "

" Double reins with Pelham bit, sir."

" Put on my bridle with a spade curb," Glover said. " He may be a little skittish at first. It's been a long time since I've ridden him, and he acts like he had got pretty wild again."

A stable police hurried up and began to groom Frog's back. Meyers brought Glover's saddle and a bridle equipped with a wicked-looking bit. Frog submitted quietly to having the bridle put on, did not wince as the strange saddle was tossed onto his back and cinched tightly in place. Glover stepped forward and gathered the reins.

He vaulted lightly into the saddle. Frog stiffened at his touch, then relaxed as the rider gained his seat. Glover touched him lightly with his spur, and Frog moved off at a decorous walk. He went slowly around the exercise paddock three times, the limp growing appreciably less as he warmed up his bruised leg. Glover set him into a trot. He went around the paddock again, then Glover set him at a low brush hurdle, rising less than a foot from the ground. Frog took it in his stride, almost as if it were not there. Colonel Thayer clapped his hands in appreciation of the grace of the jump. Glover guided Frog back toward the picket line to gain headway for a somewhat higher jump at the other end of the paddock.

As they approached the end of the covered picket line, an erect, muscular figure in mud-stained khaki appeared around the corner of the building. Scott opened his lips to call Frog, but the words died unuttered as his startled gaze fell on the rider.

" Glover! " he said to himself. " What the deuce is he doing riding Frog? "

He started again to call, then reconsidered as his eye fell on Colonel Thayer. With a puzzled air he stepped back out of sight, watching through the screened corner of the picket line.

Scott had appeared so suddenly, and had moved back under cover so quietly that neither Colonel Thayer, whose attention was fixed on Frog, nor Glover, who was also watching the horse with an alert tenseness, prepared for possible trouble, saw him. Not so, however, with Frog. His quick eye had caught the movement as Scott came into view, and his ears went forward with a jerk. He whinnied anxiously as Scott disappeared and swerved to the left toward the spot where his master had stood. Glover wrenched savagely at the bridle. By sheer force he pulled Frog's head around, but the horse went sideways toward the spot where his keen eye could still detect the shadowy outlines of Scott's figure.

Again Glover wrenched at the horse's head. Frog's ears went back and his teeth showed, but even the cruel punishment of the brutally-used bit did not at once destroy the effects of Scott's training. He swung back momentarily into the direction in which Glover wished him to go, then suddenly bolted for the corner of the picket line.

Glover ripped out an oath. His left hand drew back with a jerk on the wicked bit. Frog's lower jaw dropped under the punishment. Setting his forefeet, he stopped with a suddenness that would have unseated a less skillful rider than Glover. The lieutenant gripped the horse with his thin, bony knees, and bore back on the bit. Frog's head went down, and he rose from the ground in a stiff-legged buck.

Glover was thrown forward onto the pommel of the saddle, but he recovered his seat almost instantly. Another oath came from his lips. His long-rowelled spurs went home with a severe dig into Frog's flanks. Beads of blood appeared on the horse's sides from the pricks of the sharp steel points. Glover's right hand went up, came down with a vicious swing. Frog gave a scream of rage as the heavy braided quirt bit into his tender flank. For nearly a year he had felt steel only in a gentle, guiding touch, and leather not at all. The almost-forgotten brutality, which had been his daily lot until Scott had taken him to break, woke the sleeping devil in the horse. No longer was he Frog, the well-loved polo pony; he was again Frog, the outlaw, the horse that knew no master.

Without a preliminary crouch, he shot forward fifteen feet in one long leap. Well it was for Glover that he had ridden the horse before and remembered that trick. He kept his seat by pulling leather, and plied his quirt mercilessly, the rowelled spurs rammed home in Frog's flanks.

Frog did not pause. He landed from the leap only to go into a series of stiff-legged bucks which shook his rider almost loose from the saddle. He bucked high and made a half-turn at the same time. Glover pulled leather again, but Frog gave him no rest. He rose on his hind legs and went over backwards.

Glover did not have time to change ends with the quirt and beat the horse down with the loaded end, but he had time to free his feet and leap clear as the horse crashed over. As he landed, his quirt went up, and came down with a swish, leaving a red welt on Frog's flank.

As the quirt fell, there was a cry of rage from the picket line. Out from his shelter Scott leaped and raced forward, his face white with rage and his fists clenched. Engrossed in the battle being waged in the paddock, neither Colonel Thayer nor Sergeant Meyers saw him.

Frog screamed with rage again as he felt the blow. He scrambled to his feet, but Glover was in the saddle before he was fairly up. As soon as Frog was on his feet, he dashed madly for the other side of the paddock, swerving from side to side as he ran in a manner which tested to the uttermost Glover's ability to ride.

An open picket line loomed before them. Glover threw himself over on one side, only his leg remaining in the saddle as Frog thundered under the low-strung line which would have swept the lieutenant to the ground, had he tried to keep his seat. Once past the picket line, Glover swung up to regain his seat, but he never reached it. Frog swung his head around with snake-like quickness. Vicious teeth gripped Glover's knee and dragged him from the saddle. As the battle wavered in the balance, Frog shot forward again in a fifteen-foot leap. At the same instant, he released his grip on Glover's knee. The lieutenant went back over Frog's crupper, and his head struck the ground with a crash.

Frog landed from his jump, reared, and whirled about. The prostrate form of his enemy lay helpless on the ground a few feet away. With a squeal of rage, Frog charged, his teeth bared. At Glover's body he paused, reared, his forefeet aimed for deadly, lashing blows. Colonel Thayer, who was racing across the field to the policed lieutenant's assistance, paused in dismay. He was a hundred feet away and was helpless to prevent the pending tragedy

Frog's feet came down in vicious strokes at the helpless Glover.

"FROG!"

A commanding voice rang across the corral. Into the depths of the horse's rage-maddened brain it struck, brushed aside the red fog of hatred which clouded it. Instinctively Frog swerved. The deadly hoofs landed harmlessly on the ground beside Glover. Colonel Thayer gave a gasp of relief, looked around wonderingly to see whose voice had wrought the miracle.

"Frog, come here!"

Again the voice sounded, terse, commanding. Frog whirled about. Fifty yards away Scott was coming toward him at a run. Forgotten in an instant was the helpless Glover, forgotten was everything except that Frog's master was in sight and was calling him. The horse gave a loud whinny of joy and trotted toward the approaching figure. Scott caught him by the bridle, drew down his head and threw both arms around his neck.

"Poor pony," he said, rubbing his cheeks against Frog's as the horse nuzzled him, whinnying with joy. "I don't blame you a bit, but you mustn't kill him, you know. He's an officer . . . and a gentleman, by Act of Congress. Come along, I've got something to say to him."

With Frog following quietly at his heels, Scott strode up to Glover, who was slowly getting to his feet. Scott's face was white with rage as he faced the ex-cavalryman.

" You—you cad! " he said, his voice dripping cold, deadly rage. " Who gave you permission to ride my horse? "

Glover winced, drew back at the sight of Scott's bloodless face and clenched fists.

" Colonel Thayer ordered me to," he muttered. " I—I didn't want to."

" I'll check that statement later," said Scott in a merciless voice. " Pull yourself together and get ready to fight, unless you want to take lying down the sweetest thrashing a man ever got. I'm going to use the same quirt on you that you used on Frog."

" That will do, Mr. Scott! "

Scott instinctively stiffened to attention at the sharp, incisive command of the Chief of Staff. Colonel Thayer had come up, unseen and unheard by the two lieutenants.

" That will do," he repeated. " I'll admit that he deserves a good thrashing, but I can't let a good officer run his head into a noose, just to punish a man like that. You think a lot of Frog, don't you, Mr. Scott? "

" He's the finest mount I've ever had, sir," said

Scott warmly. "He's as gentle as a baby to people who treat him right, but he won't stand for the kind of treatment Glover gives a horse. Glover was sent out of the Nineteenth Cavalry for brutality to horses, after he had nearly ruined half the officer's chargers in the corral. Frog was one of his mounts once, and you can see how he loves him."

As he spoke a velvet muzzle was thrust under his arm. Scott slid up one hand and playfully tweaked Frog's ears. Colonel Thayer smiled, then grew suddenly grave.

"How did your horse get in such a condition, Mr. Scott?" he asked.

"We both nearly went out carrying dispatches last night, sir, in connection with the maneuvers. It's too long a story to tell, but I had to go on, so I left him here and went to Quarry Heights by automobile last night. Frog couldn't have made that extra two miles from here to department headquarters if he had had to."

"You can tell me about it as we go, Mr. Scott. I want you to go right back to Quarry Heights with me and tell General Kingdon about this morning's happenings. He'll be quite interested in learning how an officer on his staff tried to win a steeple-chase by taking your horse away from you on the basis of statements that are perilously close to lies, if they aren't actually untruths."

"Take my horse? Glover?" cried Scott in amazement. "Why, he . . ."

"Don't worry, Mr. Scott. I've seen that horse obey your voice, and I've observed how much he loves you. As long as I'm Chief of Staff here, no one will ever get that horse away from you, no matter how hard he tries."

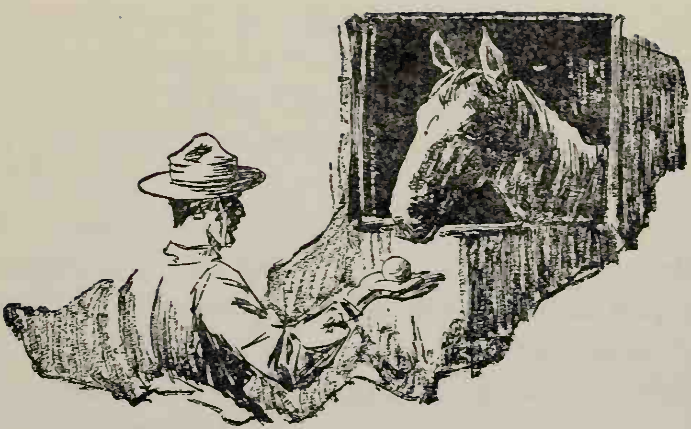
He turned to the trembling Glover. "Go to your quarters, sir," he said, "and remain there under arrest until General Kingdon decides what disposition he will make of your case. No arguments," he added sharply as Glover started to protest. "Go to your quarters, sir!"

Glover, his face as white as a sheet, saluted and turned away. Frog gave a convulsive start, made as if to follow him.

"Steady, Frog," said Scott in a quiet tone. To Colonel Thayer he said: "I think I'd better stay with Frog until Glover gets out of the corral, sir. If I don't, there may be a killing."

"It might be a good idea," assented the colonel as he stroked Frog's neck. "Personally, I'd like to turn the two of them loose in a ten acre field with a high fence around it, and let Frog settle him, but that wouldn't be according to good order and military discipline, would it, Frog?"

Frog gravely rubbed his muzzle against the colonel's shirt.



XIII

AGAINST LONG ODDS

THE annual gymkhana ball of the Panama Canal Department was in full swing. In one corner of the Corozal Officers' Club, the Artillery band blared forth syncopated melodies. Under the palm-frond shaded lights, a hundred couples swayed to the music. The gold-bedecked mess jackets of the officers vied in splendor with the bright gowns of the ladies of the department. Every branch of the service was represented, for the gymkhana was an event in which every post took part, even the Infantry sending entries from Gatun and Culebra.

The music stopped and the ripple of applause died out. Evelyn Bennitt rested her fingers lightly on Lieutenant Scott's arm as they made their way through the crowd to the Cavalry corner.

" This is a nice man, Daddy," she said to her father as she sank into a chair. " He can dance almost as well as he can play polo."

Colonel Bennitt laughed.

" Do your duty, Lacey," he said with mock severity to the adjutant. Lacey rose to the occasion.

" Now, Miss Bennitt," he protested, " you mustn't say things like that. It doesn't give the rest of us a break. Anyway, Scotty is so insufferably swelled-headed as it is that there's no living with him. If you make him any worse, the weight of his head will break Frog's back, and then, much as I hate to admit it, it's good-bye to the steeple-chase tomorrow morning."

" It's a shame it had to be put off," said Evelyn. " If that horrid rain hadn't come up, the gymkhana would be over, and we'd have the trophy safely in our possession right now. Wouldn't we, Scotty? "

Lacey groaned. " Scotty, again! " he said

" Honestly, Colonel, that daughter of yours is incorrigible."

Scott joined in the laugh at his expense, a slight flush of embarrassment on his clean-cut face.

" I hope so, Evelyn, but you can never safely count your chickens before they're hatched, you know. Glover is a mighty fine rider, and Grey Dawn is no truck horse. The steeple-chase is anybody's event until the winner passes the post."

" What good would it do him to win? Quarry Heights isn't even in the running. They haven't taken a single first yet."

" No, but if they nose us out of first in the steeplechase, the trophy will go to Corozal. They are three points ahead of us, you know. We need that five points that first will give us. Luckily for us, Corozal hasn't an entry who'll have a chance at either first or second unless Frog and Grey Dawn drop dead."

" We'll win," prophesied Evelyn confidently. " Frog isn't going to drop dead, and neither is Scotty. No one can beat that pair, least of all that egg, Glover."

There was a slight cough at her elbow. Evelyn looked up quickly, crimsoned with embarrassment as her eyes met those of the officer she had just characterized as " that egg." Glover controlled his features, made a cold smile play over his thin lips.

" May I have the pleasure of the next dance, Miss Bennitt? " he asked formally.

" I'm sorry, Mr. Glover," Evelyn said with icy distinctness. " All the rest of my dances this evening are promised."

Glover bowed low to hide the wave of anger which swept over his thin face. " I'm sorry," he forced himself to say in an even voice as he turned away.

" Evelyn," said her father sternly, " that was hardly courteous."

" I don't care," the girl flashed hotly. " He deserved it. After the lies he told two months ago when he tried to steal Frog from Scotty, he had no business to even speak to a Cavalry woman, let alone ask her to dance."

" He was punished by General Kingdon for that," the colonel said, " and it is an army law, that once a punishment is awarded, the offense is wiped out. Grudges aren't held against a man."

" Maybe they aren't officially, Daddy, but remember that if Scotty hadn't argued with the general for an hour, Glover would have been tried by court-martial. Would you like to have him back in your regiment again . . . since you don't hold grudges? "

Colonel Bennitt flushed, then laughed.

" Don't ever argue with a woman, Lacey," he cautioned his adjutant. " No, Evelyn," he went on to his daughter, " I wouldn't want Glover back in the Nineteenth, but that incident has nothing to do with my feelings. I wouldn't want him because he isn't a good cavalryman."

" Well, then," said Evelyn triumphantly, " I'm in the same boat. My refusal to dance had nothing to do with the incident either. I wouldn't dance with him because he isn't a good dancer-man."

Glover turned and left the dance hall, his dark face suffused with rage. Things had not gone any too well with him since his enforced transfer from the Nineteenth Cavalry. Nor did it improve his temper to reflect that, but for Scott's magnanimity, he would have been tried for his actions in connection with Frog. When General Kingdon finally dismissed the case with a severely worded reprimand, he had warned Glover privately that he could expect little mercy if he were again reported for any delinquency.

Glover ground his teeth as he plunged forward into the darkness. He hated the world, he hated the service, and above all, he hated Scott. Scott seemed to be his evil genius; Scott and Frog. Until he had striven to break the horse, he had got along well enough in the regiment, but that had started his downfall. Now it seemed that at every turn he ran against one or the other, and always to his discomfiture. Tomorrow was just another example. With

Frog out of the way, he would be almost certain to win the steeple-chase and throw the trophy to Corozal. He was not especially anxious to see the Artillery win, but he would rather see the trophy go even to the Infantry than to Empire, the post which had cast him out.

If Frog were only out of the way! Slowly the thought penetrated his consciousness, began to take crude form. He stopped suddenly in his stride, gave a guilty look around as if fearful that some passer-by would catch his thoughts. There was no one in sight. He walked slowly onward, turning the thought over in his mind. Gradually the details became clear. There was a way—if a man were willing to take a chance. It lacked half an hour of midnight. He started toward the corral, then suddenly checked himself. His white mess jacket was too conspicuous. He changed his direction and went to the bachelor quarters instead. There he pulled off the gold-decorated white coat and donned another of darker, less conspicuous hue. From a drawer he took a bunch of keys and thrust them into his pocket.

"I don't think you'll add to your laurels tomorrow, Mr. Scott," he said grimly to himself as he walked toward the corral. "With Frog out of the running, Grey Dawn has a cinch. I'll make the Nineteenth Cavalry sorry that they turned me out of their snobbish mess."

His keys admitted him to the corral office, and laid the medicine chest open before him. He took from its case a large hypodermic syringe. He shook a half-dozen white tablets from a bottle into a glass, then added an ounce of water. When they were dissolved, he drew the liquid up into the syringe. He replaced the medicine in the chest and locked it carefully. With the loaded syringe in his hand, he stole through the corral toward the row of box stalls where he knew that Frog was stabled for the night.

He stopped outside the end stall and peered sharply into it. Frog was lying down asleep, but the cautious footsteps awakened him. His first waking breath brought him the odor he detested, the smell he had learned to associate with his enemy. The horse scrambled to his feet, his teeth bared and his hoofs ready for action. Glover sprang back from the door of the stall.

" You'll get no chance to kick me, you devil," he muttered. " I'll go after you from the top-side."

He glanced hurriedly around. No one was in sight. He walked around the end of the building, caught the edge of the partition which was the side of Frog's stall, and swung himself up. He was well above the horse now, out of reach of flying heels. He leaned far over, the syringe in his outstretched hand. With a swift movement he drove it down, forcing the needle through the skin on Frog's rump. The horse lashed out viciously but Glover kept the syringe in place, pressing down steadily on the plunger until it was home and the contents of the syringe were under the horse's skin.

He withdrew the needle. Just as it came out, he gave a sudden start. The syringe slipped unheeded from his hand and fell to the floor inside Frog's stall. Glover listened intently. He could hear nothing, but some instinct born of a guilty conscience told him that men were coming. He jumped down from the partition. There was a rending sound as his trousers caught on a nail, followed by a faint metallic clink. Glover clapped his hand to the tear and swore volubly under his breath. In another instant he was gone, slinking off into the shadows.

He slipped along the edge of the stable until he came to a light. He hesitated a moment and cast a quick glance around. There was no one in sight and he stepped boldly across the lighted space. Once more in the darkness, he took up a jog-trot toward the bachelor quarters, failing to see the two dark forms which had stepped back noiselessly into the shadows as Glover had approached the light. As the lieutenant disappeared, the two men came out of the darkness and looked intently after his retreating figure.

" Tubby, that was Snake-foot," said Baker, turning to his companion. " What the dickens is he doing down here at this time of night? "

" I'll bet a chicken dinner that he isn't up to anything good," answered Winsoton.

" What do you want, a sure thing? Of course he wasn't. Say, Tubby, I'll bet that was what disturbed Frog. A smell of that guy is enough to give any self-respecting horse the jitters. We'd better go down and look at him and quiet him down. He needs a good rest tonight."

" Yes, and we'd better look around and see if we can find out what Snake-foot was doing here. I don't like the looks of that, Pete."

At an improvised starting barrier, eight horses milled anxiously about, waiting for it to be sprung. On one end of the line Lieutenant Glover, wearing the dark blue jacket of department headquarters, sat Grey Dawn, a beautiful Arab mare, only an inch less than sixteen hands high. Next to him was Major Twill in the crimson and white of the Artillery, sitting Emperor with the grace of a centaur. Three places away, Scott, in the blue and gold of the Nineteenth Cavalry, sat on Frog.

In curious contrast to the nervousness of the other horses, Frog was steady, almost lethargic in his movements. Gone was the fine-strung nervousness with which he ordinarily awaited the springing of a barrier, the alertness with which he was ready to spring into the lead with the long fifteen foot jump from a standstill which had won him his name. He stood with listlessly hanging head, seemingly indifferent to the race, and to the excited horses about him. Scott bent forward anxiously and spoke encouraging words into his ear. Frog momentarily arched his neck and showed some of his former fire, then slipped back again into his dejected attitude.

In the stands, Colonel Bennitt and Evelyn watched eagerly, the colonel's face drawn with ill-concealed worry. It was evident to the veteran horseman that something was radically wrong with Empire's entry.

The warning notes of a bugle sounded on the air. The horses milled with increasing eagerness. Soldiers stood ready at the barrier. Scott crouched low on Frog, ready for the long leap which would put them well in the lead of the field. Frog crouched for the jump, but his old-time fire was gone. A pistol shot rang out. The barrier disappeared as if by magic. With a thudding of hoofs, the field broke away.

Frog essayed to leap in his usual manner, but the spring of his legs was gone. He covered less than ten feet on the jump, and he stumbled as he landed. Before he could recover his balance and swing into his stride, the entire field were half a dozen lengths in front, Glover's dark blue jacket in the van. Scott caught up Frog's reins, bent low over the horse's neck and spoke encouragingly to him.

Frog strove gallantly to respond, but his drug-deadened muscles would not respond to his efforts. He ran his best, but the gap between him and the rest of the starters widened steadily. In desperation, Scott drove home his long spurs. Frog bounded at the sharp pain, and went ahead with something of his old dash. For a time he held his distance, even gained a couple of lengths on the horses in front, who were now spreading out and jockeying for position as the first jump, a three-foot brush hurdle, came into view.

They rose over it with hardly a delay, but the pause, short as it was, enabled the partially-aroused Frog to almost close the gap. The jump loomed before him. Ordinarily Frog would have taken it in his stride, rising like a deer, and losing not a foot of headway. Now, however, he paused for a fraction of a second before he rose. His forefeet struck the hurdle and crashed through the brush. His rear hoofs rang on the bars, throwing him off his stride. He landed clumsily, stumbled, almost went down.

The field were drawing far away from him. Scott leaned far out and laid a hand on the horse's neck.

" Please, Frog," he implored. " Buck up, pony. Go after them. You can get them yet. Come on, boy! "

Frog responded gallantly to his master's voice, but his muscles would not obey the orders of his drug-clouded brain. He ran well for a few rods, then began to fall back. Scott was thinking rapidly.

" Something's wrong," he muttered. " I'll have to rouse him some way, and do it quickly, or this race is lost. I hate to treat him this way, but . . ."

He raised the heavy quirt which he was carrying in place of his usual crop. He drove home his long spurs, and at the same instant, brought the lash of the quirt with a stinging stroke across Frog's tender flank. The horse gave a bound as the lash bit home. In an instant, the drug-curtains were drawn from before his brain. There was only one man in recent months who had struck him like that. With a squeal of rage, he settled himself to buck. Again the quirt bit home. Maddened with rage, Frog grabbed the bit in his teeth and bolted.

Straight down the track he tore after the other horses. Scott, riding the saddle easily, made no effort to guide him, still less to restrain him. Another jump loomed before them, this one a ten-foot water jump with a landing a foot higher than the take-off. Frog took it like a bird, landed in full stride. The other horses were straggling out now, the nearest only six lengths ahead. Now it was that Scott tightened the reins, and strove to guide his mount. Before them was a turn in the track. Scott knew that unless he could gain control of Frog before they reached it, the horse would bolt the course. He leaned forward in his stirrups and laid a quieting hand on Frog's neck.

" Steady, boy," he said soothingly.

Frog gave a start at the sound of the well-loved voice, and became suddenly amenable to the guiding touch of rein and spur. He was no longer last as they rounded the curve. Two horses were behind him, but a good twelve lengths in front, Grey Dawn was clearing the third jump, a four-foot brush hurdle, with ease. She was six lengths ahead of the next horse and was running easily. It looked as though Quarry Heights had the steeple-chase safely won. No one, except the handful of over-enthusiastic cavalrymen from Empire, conceded a chance to the blue and gold entry who was now sixth and who seemed unable to get any closer to the front.

Scott leaned forward to ease the weight on Frog, and talked to the horse constantly. The sound of his voice spurred his mount on to his best efforts.

Slowly he came abreast of another horse, then forged past it. Now there were only four horses ahead of him.

The fourth jump, a nasty three-foot hurdle with six feet of water in front of it, loomed up. There was a crash, and a crimson-clad rider splashed in the water as his horse slipped on the take-off and fell. Corozal's single entry was eliminated. Frog, encouraged by Scott's spur, took the jump faultlessly, although his hoofs scraped through the brush. He was neck and neck with the third horse now. Another effort, and only one horse was between him and Grey Dawn with her blue-clad rider.

Another wide water jump confronted them. Scott sent Frog at it, but the horse hesitated, changed leads as he approached. He cleared it, but his rear hoofs splashed in the water. As he scrambled up onto the firm ground, Scott could feel him trembling under him. The effect of the quirt blows had passed, and the morphine which Glover had treacherously injected was again asserting its baleful influence. With a lump in his throat, Scott raised the quirt again. He lowered it, then raised it once more. Frog was fighting gamely against his heavy handicap, but the gap between him and the two horses ahead of him was widening steadily. From behind came a thudding of hoofs as another entry began to close the gap which Frog had opened between them.

With a sob, Scott brought down the punishing leather. Once again Frog shot forward like an arrow. Again and again Scott swung the heavy quirt, leaving raised welts on Frog's flank. The horse screamed with rage. The drug mist, which had closed down on him again, cleared. Ahead of him Frog saw a grey horse, and on her a rider whom he knew. It must be that man who was reponsible for the stinging pain in his side. It had always been that man who had struck and punished him. It was that man who had sneaked up and stabbed him last night. With bared teeth, Frog gripped the bit and tore out after Glover, murder in his heart.

He shot past the second horse as if it were tied. Fifteen lengths ahead of him was his enemy, the man on whom he had repeatedly tried to wreak his vengeance, but who had always escaped. This time, Frog resolved, there would be no escape. Rage did what love had failed to do, swept aside the effects of the morphine. Like an avenging cyclone, Frog tore on down the track.

Jump after jump loomed up, but Frog heeded them not at all. Each one he took in his stride, and each one found him closer to the object of his pursuit. Grey Dawn was less than a length ahead now, and Glover was plying whip and spur mercilessly. Scott held his reins just tight enough to feel his mount's mouth, and let Frog run his own race. He knew that it was only rage that was keeping the horse up.

A four-foot hurdle rose before them. Grey Dawn, almost exhausted, took it sluggishly. Frog went over it with six inches to spare, and landed almost beside the grey mare. His teeth reached out viciously for Glover's leg, only a few inches in front of his nose.

Glover glanced back over his shoulder. His face went white with fear at the sight of the rage-mad horse and the grim face of its rider. He smote Grey Dawn mercilessly with his quirt. The gallant mare responded and drew momentarily ahead, but she was no match for Frog. Slowly he closed the gap until Glover's leg was once more within reach. Glover looked back, lashed Grey Dawn viciously, but she had done her best. Even the brutal blows of the quirt could force no more speed from her tired muscles. Frog's teeth were within an inch of Glover's leg. The lieutenant turned in his saddle and lashed Frog viciously across the face.

Scott gave a cry of rage. Frog was momentarily driven back by the blow, then came on with fresh rage in his heart. Again and again Glover swung his heavy quirt, but the blows no longer made Frog pause. With bared teeth he forged ahead, intent only on gripping his enemy's leg and dragging him to the road, where lashing hoofs would soon wipe out the score of past and present injuries.

The last jump, fourteen feet of water, was before them. Grey Dawn gathered herself with an effort. Frog made a lunge for Glover's leg. His teeth snapped together, a fraction of an inch short, but his shoulder struck Grey Dawn. The blow was a slight one, but enough to throw her momentarily off her balance. She made the jump, but landed three feet short. She floundered helplessly for a moment in the soft bottom, then scrambled out onto hard ground, but her chance of winning was gone.

Just as Frog's teeth had snapped, Scott drew back his reins with a sudden jerk. It was this that made Frog's grab for his enemy's leg futile. In that instant, Scott laid a hand on the horse's neck, and spoke quietly, firmly, authoritatively. Frog checked for the fraction of a second needed for Scott to gather him for the jump. The well-trained horse responded automatically to the firm guiding touch, and rose across the jump without apparent effort. As he landed, he reared and whirled about, intent only on reaching Glover.

Now was Scott's horsemanship put to the supreme test. He pulled Frog's head around and pressed his spurs home, gently, yet firmly. For an instant it was nip and tuck between Frog's inclination and his training, but the months of careful work which Scott had done bore their fruit. Frog whirled and dashed toward the finish line, a hundred yards away.

Gone was the wild fury which had braced him up, and which had rendered the heavy dose of morphine he carried of no avail. Fatigue and the drug began to tell swiftly. His gait grew slower, then faltered. Scott leaned forward and begged the horse for his last ounce of strength. Frog tried to respond, but his run dropped to a shuffling gallop, then to a trot. From behind came the thunder of hoofs as Grey Dawn, recovered from her faulty jump, gained on him. The finish line was only a few lengths away. Scott leaned forward. Into the horse's ear he shouted one magic word:

"CHARGE!"

Frog's cavalry training told. He gave a sudden bound, broke into a shambling run. The finish line drew nearer. With one last convulsive leap he crossed it, half a length ahead of Grey Dawn. He struck the ground heavily, swayed for an instant, then crumpled in a heap. Scott leaped free just in time to keep from being pinioned under the falling horse. Frog struck the ground heavily, twitched once or twice, and then lay still, his muscles rigid and blood gushing from his nostrils.

Scott struggled to his feet. Severely shaken as he was, he ignored his own hurts, his first thought being for the horse. He staggered to Frog's head, shouldered aside an officer who was bent over him. The officer, on whose shoulders gleamed the silver leaves of a lieutenant colonel, gave back for an instant, then pressed authoritatively forward.

" Let me look at that horse, Lieutenant," he said with crisp authority.

Scott recognized the department veterinary officer. He stepped back while Colonel McKeown bent again over Frog, raised his eyelid, and peered steadily at the pupil, contracted almost to pinpoint size. He rose, his face stern.

" I was right, sir," he said positively. " That horse was doped! "

Scott followed the direction of the colonel's gaze, stiffened at attention involuntarily as he saw the twin silver stars on the shoulders of the officer to whom Colonel McKeown had spoken.

" Are you sure of that, Colonel? " asked General Kingdon.

" Absolutely certain, sir. That horse was heavily drugged—with morphine, or some similar substance. It's a wonder that he finished the race before he collapsed. I doubt whether he'll ever recover consciousness."

General Kingdon's face grew stern.

"That will need some explaining," he said sharply.

"I think I can explain it, General," came Colonel Bennitt's clear voice. Accompanied by Colonel Thayer and followed by three enlisted men, he had just joined the group.

"I hope you can, Bennitt," answered the general.

"I think I can, sir. May I ask that Lieutenant Glover be sent for at once?"

"Here he is," replied a voice. Glover, dripping with water and splashed with mud from the last jump, was thrust forward. Colonel Bennitt fixed him with a steely glare.

"Where were you at midnight last night, Mr. Glover?" he asked.

Glover turned pale, looked away uneasily from that piercing gaze. He turned to General Kingdon as if for protection.

"Why must I be questioned, sir?" he asked. "Frog isn't my horse."

The general turned a puzzled glance from Glover to Colonel Bennitt.

"I don't understand this," he said.

" You will in a few minutes, sir," replied Colonel Bennitt grimly. " Sergeant Baker, tell your story."

Sergeant Baker stepped forward and saluted smartly.

" I was in the corral last night ——" he began.

" Who are you ? " interrupted the general.

" I'm stable sergeant of the headquarters corral at Empire, sir. I came over here in charge of our entries. Last night at midnight, Sergeant Winsoton and I were coming back from town, we'd been having a chicken dinner at the American House, sir, and we heard a disturbance near Frog's stall. We started out to see what the trouble was, and we saw someone slipping along in the shadows, like he didn't want to be seen. We stepped back into a stall while he passed under a light. It was Lieutenant Glover, sir, dressed in a khaki coat and black trousers. We let him pass, and then went on to Frog's stall. It took us an hour to quiet him down. He acted all nervous, like. This morning he acted dopey and heavy. I couldn't find a veterinary officer, so I sent him out. When we cleaned his stall, Sergeant Winsoton found this."

He extended his hand in which was a nickeled hypodermic syringe. General Kingdon stared at the syringe, then at Glover. Glover's face grew chalky, then contracted in a sudden spasm of rage.

" It's a lie, sir," he said vehemently. " Both these men, Baker and Winsoton, have a personal grudge against me, ever since I had to discipline them at Empire. They probably doped the horse themselves, then made up this lie to throw suspicion on me."

There was a sudden movement. Sergeant Winsoton, his plump face red with anger, lunged forward, his pudgy fists clenched. Colonel Bennitt laid a restraining hand on his shoulder. Winsoton glanced at the colonel, then stepped back. General Kingdon took the syringe from Baker and examined it carefully.

" Where does this belong? " he asked. " I see it is stamped, ' United States Property.' "

" I can answer that question, sir," replied Colonel Thayer. " It belongs to the medicine chest of the department headquarters corral. Here, Sergeant Meyers, tell the general what you found this morning."

" After Sergeant Winsoton had found that syringe, I checked up on our medicine chest," said Sergeant Meyers. " That syringe, and six half-grain morphine tablets are missing."

" How did you get into the narcotics compartment in the chest? " demanded Glover. " I have the only keys to it." He paused. A wave of color swept over his face as he realized what he had said. " That is, I—I lost my keys yesterday afternoon," he added stumblingly.

" Yes, sir," replied Sergeant Meyers. " I found them just outside Frog's stall this morning. Also, I found signs where someone had climbed up on the partition at the side of the stall. In getting down, he caught his pants on a nail and tore them. This piece of cloth was left on the nail, sir."

He handed General Kingdon a fragment of black broadcloth. Glover gave a gasp. His face went as white as chalk. General Kingdon glared at him for an instant, then turned pointedly away.

" Colonel Thayer," he said sternly to his chief of staff, " you will accompany Mr. Glover to his quarters and examine the trousers of his mess jacket. If you find what I expect, you will place him under close arrest. If his resignation from the army, for the good of the service, is in my hands within one hour, I will act on it. If not, I will let a general court-martial have the case. I need not tell you, Mr. Glover, that it will mean dismissal. Take your choice."

He turned his back on Glover, found himself face to face with Scott.

" Couldn't I intercede for Glover, sir? " asked Scott. " Frog won the race anyway, even if—if ——" He choked, unable to finish the sentence.

Tears ran down his face as he glanced at Frog's body, over which Colonel McKeown was still bending.

"No, Mr. Scott," said the general kindly, yet with a note of finality in his voice. "Your intercession saved him two months ago, and for reward he poisoned your horse, the finest polo pony on the Zone. No, this is the end for him."

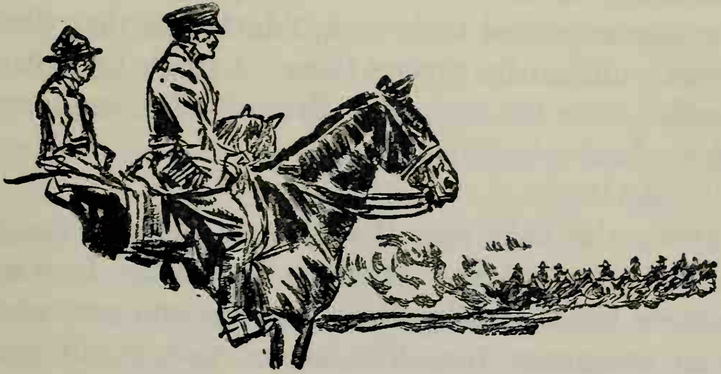
"But, sir . . ." began Scott. The sentence was never finished. From Colonel McKeown came a sudden cry of surprise. Scott looked around. Frog's eyes had opened and he was feebly trying to raise his head from the ground. With an inarticulate cry Scott sprang forward and threw himself down on his knees by the horse.

"Don't touch him!" said Colonel McKeown sharply. He looked up and waved his hand. "Back, everybody, please!" he cried. "The horse is coming around. If you'll keep back and give him a chance, he may possibly—just possibly—pull through."

Scott staggered back, his breath coming in sobs, and tears running unrestrained down his face. Colonel Bennitt caught him by the shoulders, threw a supporting arm around him.

"Buck up, Scotty," he said kindly. "The horse has a chance, and McKeown will do all that anyone can for him."

"I—I know it, sir," said Scott brokenly. "That's what the trouble—is, sir—just—thankfulness, sir."



XIV

“WE STILL HAVE FROG”

The band of the Nineteenth Cavalry swung out of line and took up a position facing the reviewing stand. Troop after troop swept by in perfect alignment, sabres erect at the salute. They went around the parade ground at a walk, and then the band changed tempo. At a trot, the lines again swept past, the well-trained horses still keeping almost a perfect line. The last troop passed and swung off in a wide circle which would take them a third time past the stand where the Department Commander and his staff sat erect on their chargers, watching the review.

From the dust-covered field a trumpet broke out in blaring notes. The band stopped in mid-note. The horses perked their ears, fidgeted so that their riders could hardly control them. A single long blast sounded from the trumpet. From the leading troop came a hoarse command:

" CHARGE! "

Down the field past the general swept a many-pointed thunderbolt. The men leaned far forward on their horses' necks, their sabre points presented to an imaginary foe. The horses were running at their best speed, yet keeping an alignment that brought an expression of approval from the watching general.

The troop slowed to a gallop, then to a trot, and broke off into column formation to return to the stables. Down the field a second troop charged, their alignment a little ragged, but coming with a will. Again General Kingdon smiled his approval.

" Well-trained cavalry, Bennitt," he said.

Colonel Bennitt flushed with pride and gratification.

" You haven't seen our crack troop yet," he said. " Wait until you see Captain Scott's troop. When he got his captaincy, I gave him Kildare's troop, and he's done wonders with it. There isn't a man—or a horse—in it that doesn't swear by him. Here they come!"

A third troop charged down the field. Although going at full speed, the troop front was as well aligned as if the horses were still at a walk. Out in front rode a sinewy, compactly-built young officer who sat his dark bay gelding as though he and the horse were part of the same organism. As they passed the stand, Scott's sabre flew up. Almost without slackening their headlong gait, the troop broke from line into column, the sabres flashing as they were returned to their scabbards. General Kingdon clapped his hands.

"I never saw that done before outside of a picked exhibition troop, Bennitt," he cried. "Please have Captain Scott report to me here."

An orderly dashed away at a gallop. He reached Scott, saluted and gave his message. Scott touched his mount with a spur. The charger reared, swung around, and raced at a dead run toward the watching general. He kept up his headlong gait until he was only a few yards away. Without moving his reins, Scott shifted his knees and spoke a quiet word. The horse slid to a stop, then stood erect, his ears perked forward, as motionless as though cast from bronze. Scott's sabre swung up in salute.

"You have a splendid troop, Captain," said the general as he returned the salute. "I have never seen a better trained line troop. But tell me," he went on as Scott flushed with pleasure. "What horse is that you're riding? Isn't it Frog?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he's better, is he? The last I heard of him, some four or five months ago, Colonel McKeown thought he'd never be good for much of anything again."

"He was pretty wobbly on his legs for the first two months after he left the hospital, sir," said Scott, "but then he started to pick up. Today, he's as strong as ever. I don't think that morphine and the strain he went through left any bad effects at all, sir."

"That's fine," exclaimed the general heartily. "We really couldn't afford to lose him. Will you use him for polo again this year?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm glad to hear it. I'd like to see some polo like he played in the championship last year, but I was afraid for a while that I wouldn't. You'll have to play pretty hard this year, you know. With Captain Kildare gone, Empire hasn't the certainty of winning that she had last year."

"Of course, sir, losing Captain Kildare was a blow to the team, but we aren’t licked yet,” said Scott with a smile. “ We still have our strongest player, you know.”

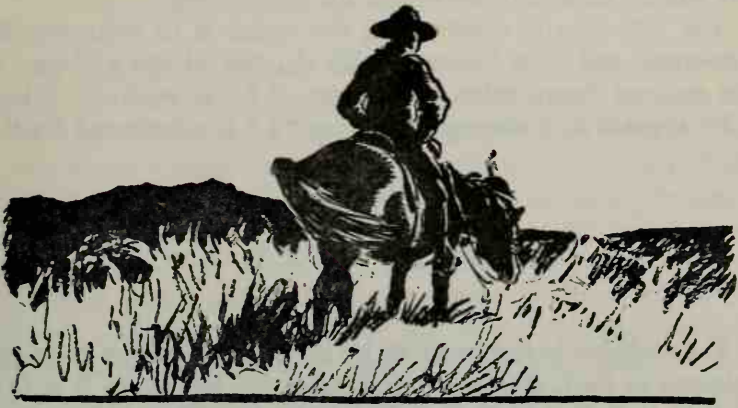
“ You mean yourself, I presume ? ”

Scott flushed hotly.

“ No, sir,” he said hastily. “ There are lots of players who are much better than I am, but we have the best polo player in the army still on our team, sir.”

“ Whom do you mean ? ”

“ We still have Frog, sir,” answered Scott with a grin.



APPENDIX

A

THE “Playfair” cipher, which the Military Intelligence Division at Washington used to transmit the cable telling of their suspicions to Lieutenant Lacey, is one of the simplest, yet most ingenious forms of cipher yet developed. It is one of the class of “two-letter ciphers,” and is almost impossible to “break” or decipher, unless the cryptographer has a good many words written in it at hand. The cipher can be carried in a man's head, and reconstructed when it is needed, in a very few minutes.

To make a “Playfair” cipher, the first requirement is that the sender and receiver agree on a certain word which is known to both of them. This is called the “key-word.” Suppose that the word “Pershing” be chosen for a key-word.

The first step in constructing the cipher is to write out the key-word, and then follow it with the rest of the alphabet in the manner shown below. The letter “J” is omitted. Where “J” appears in a message, the letter “I” is substituted for it.

```
P E R S H I N G
A B C D F K L M
O Q T U V W X Y
Z
```

The alphabet is then read off by going down each of the eight columns in turn, giving as an alphabet the following: P A O Z E B Q R C T S D U H F V I K W N L X G M Y. This alphabet is then arranged in a diagram of twenty-five squares in the following manner:

P	A	O	Z	E
B	Q	R	C	T
S	D	U	H	F
V	I	K	W	N
L	X	G	M	Y

and the cipher is ready for use.

To use the cipher, the message which is to be enciphered is written out in ordinary English, with no spaces between words. The first two letters are spotted on the cipher, and the two letters which fall on opposite diagonals to the two true letters, are written down as the cipher letters.

Thus, in the message which Lieutenant Lacey received, it was first written out without spaces between the words in this form:

“THOROUGHLYAUTHENTICATEDREPORTSINDICATETH, etc.”

Each pair of letters was then referred to the diagram, and the pair of letters lying on opposite diagonals were written down as the cipher letters. For the first two letters, “TH,” the letters on the opposite diagonals are “CF.” When the second pair of letters, “OR” are spotted on the diagram, they lie in the same vertical column, and so no diagonals can be used. In such a case, the encipherer drops each letter down one space on the diagram and uses the letters he finds there, in this case, “RU.” The third pair of letters, “OU” also lie in the same vertical column, so they are written “RK.” The fourth pair, “GH” are on the diagram in such a place that the letters lying on the opposite diagonals, “MU” can be used. In the fifth pair of letters, “LY,” they are found to lie in the same horizontal column. When this happens, the letters found one space to the left of the true ones are used, in this case, "YM." In the sixth pair, "AU," opposite diagonals are used, giving the letters "OD" as the cipher letters. In case a pair of letters happen to be a double letter, as would be the case were the word "speed" being enciphered a letter "X" is inserted in the message, thus: spexed. The first pair are now "SP," the second pair "EX" and the third pair "ED." When the cipher is translated, the "X" is very evidently an inserted letter and is thrown out.

By following out the method shown, the message to Lieutenant Lacey, as given above, is enciphered as follows:

"CFRURKMUYMODCFTYQNQZFTUQZERUBFVWIXQZ FTCF, etc."

For transmission it was broken into ten letter groups, and when Lieutenant Lacey showed it to Scott, it read as follows:

"CFRURKMUYM ODCFTYQNQZ FTUQZERUBF VWIXQZFTCF, etc."

The person receiving the message, knowing the key-word agreed upon and the system of ciphering, can construct a cipher in a few minutes and translate the message. Once he has done so, he can destroy the cipher and construct a fresh one when need arises. A spy using this cipher does not need to carry any incriminating paper on his person or in his baggage, for he can construct his cipher whenever he wishes to send or translate a message.

A short message in this form of cipher is almost, if not quite impossible to break or decipher unless one knows the form of cipher used and has, or can guess, the key-word. Given several hundred words, an expert cryptographer can break the cipher, but it means a great deal of hard tedious work, due to the fact that the repetition frequencies are not normal.

The method given is the simplest form of using the "Playfair" cipher, and it can be varied and made more difficult, by changing the key-word at regularly-agreed-upon intervals, say every fifty letters, by introducing "nulls" or meaningless jumbles of letters at certain irregular intervals, and in a number of other ways. This all adds to the difficulty of the cryptographer who tries to break the cipher and may defeat him, unless the message is very long, and he is very expert.

B

The "AZBY" transposition and use of a simple substitution cipher which Lieutenant Lacey used for the false message is made as follows:

The message is first written out in plain English without any space between the words as was done in the first step of enciphering in the "Playfair" cipher. The message is then transposed, or mixed up, by taking in order: the first letter of the message, the last letter, the second letter, the next to the last letter, the third letter, the third letter from the end, and so on. Scott's false message was first written out in this form:

HAVESECUREDPROOFTHATPRIVATETHOMASRYANI
SAGENTMENTIONEDINYOURCABLEHEISUNDERCONS
TANTSURVEILLANCEANDEVERYBOATISBEINGWATCH
EDCABLEINSTRUCTIONSASTOWHEREHEISTOBECONFI
NEDWHENARRESTED.

After it was transposed, it read as follows:

HDAEVTESSEERCRUARNEEDHPWRDOEONFITFHNA
OTCPERBIOVTASTIEETHHEORMEAHSWROYTASNAISS
NAOGIETNCTUMRETNSTNIIOENLEBDAICNDYEOHUC
RTCAAWBGLNEIHEEBISSIUTNADOEBRYCROENVSETD
ANNATESCUNRAVLELI.

The transposed message was then divided arbitrarily into five (or ten) letter groups, and a simple substitution cipher used to encipher it.

To construct a simple substitution cipher, again a key-word must first be chosen. It is written out, and the balance of the alphabet is written out after it in reversed order. An ordinary alphabet is then written in normal order above it. If the key-

word chosen was "Pershing" the cipher would be as follows:
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
P E R S H I N G Z Y X W V U T Q O M L K J F D C B A

The cipher equivalent of each letter is the one appearing just below it. Thus Scott's message, in the form which Ryan finally saw it, looked like this:

GSPHF KHLLH HMRMJ PMUHH SGQDM STHTU
IZKIG UPTKR QHMEZ TFKPL KZHHK GGHTM VHPGL
DMTBK PLUPZ LLUPT NZHKU RKJVM HKULK UZZTH
UWHES PZRUS BHTGJ RMKRP PDENW UHZGH HEZLL
ZJKUP STHEM BRMTH UFLHK SPUUP KHLRJ UMPFW
HWZCC

The last two letters "CC" stand for "XX" and are put in merely to fill out the last group to five letters. They would be discarded by the decipherer.

While this is not an especially difficult method of enciphering to break, it is beyond the reach of most amateur cryptographers. A person who is very familiar with cryptography can break such a cipher in five or six hours with even a short message, for the repetition frequencies are normal. No secret agent would dare use such a method of enciphering where his messages ran any real risk of falling into the hands of an enemy government, for it would surely be broken in a short time. However, it was not simple enough to rouse Ryan's suspicion.

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